FOXES AT HOME

BY

COLONEL J. S. TALBOT.

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"HERE'S TO THE FOX," WITH HIS HOME AMONGST THE ROCKS.

FOXES AT HOME

AND

REMINISCENCES

BY

COLONEL J. S. TALBOT

(Late Shropshire Light Infantry, and Assistant Commandant Royal Military College, Camberley).

May our vixens be respected,
Our coverts never blank;
And every honest sportsman
Ride in the foremost rank.

—EARL OF LONGFORD.

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HORACE COX, "THE FIELD" OFFICE, WINDSOR HOUSE,
BREAM'S BUILDINGS, E.C.

TO

His Old Friends of the Garth Hunt.

IN SINCERE APPRECIATION OF MUCH KINDNESS SHOWN
HIM DURING MANY VERY HAPPY YEARS SPENT
IN THEIR MIDST, THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

HAVING frequently been asked to write something about the fox, I have at last attempted to do so in the hope that the result of one's personal observation and experience, after many years' careful study of this little animal in his native haunts, may prove, perhaps, of some slight interest, not only to those who, like myself, have his welfare so much at heart, but to others to whom his habits "at home" are a sealed book. And if the following pages should afford the latter a partial glimpse even behind the scenes, and create an additional interest in, and sympathy for, their subject, my humble efforts will have been well repaid.

Living as I have done for nearly twenty years in the midst of the wild track of heath and forest which extends for many miles on every side round Camberley, I have luckily had

exceptional opportunities of observing foxes in their native haunts from year to year—opportunities denied to many—of which I gladly took every advantage. One has been able in the early summer to sit for hours and watch the cubs at play, with nothing to disturb the solitude save, perhaps, the occasional harsh screech of a passing jay, or the hoarse croak of a carrion crow in the distant pine woods, making it difficult to realise that one was within a mile or so of what, I regret to say, may almost now be considered a suburb of London.

As one lies in bed at night one frequently hears the foxes barking far out on the heath—a weird sound, which reminds us of how lonely and lovely this country must have been some 150 years, or less, ago, in the exciting days of Dick Turpin, mail coaches, and the highwaymen of Bagshot Heath. All this is changing rapidly—alas! too rapidly—and soon I fear the bark of the fox will here be heard no more, and the bricks of the builder will have taken the place of the pine trees and the heather!

J. S. T.

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INTRODUCTION.

In ALBION'S isle when glorious EDGAR reigned
* * * * *
CAMBRIA'S proud Kings (tho' with reluctance) paid
Their tributary wolves; head after head,
In full account, till the woods yield no more,
And all the rav'nous race extinct is lost.
* * * * *
But yet, alas! the wily fox remained,
A subtle pilfering foe, prowling around
In midnight shade, and wakeful to destroy.
—SOMERVILE ("The Chace").

WHAT a pity it is that the wild animals of our islands are so quickly disappearing, those, I mean, which do really very little harm, and which might well be spared to form a connecting link between the present and the past; the great extent to which the preservation of game is carried on nowadays and, alas! the ever increasing curtailment of those wild and unfrequented districts where they formerly lived in comparative security are slowly, but surely, wiping them out.

The bear and the wolf have long since disappeared. These, however, we do not regret! The marten cat and the polecat, the badger and the otter, unless where the latter is strictly preserved for hunting purposes, are in many places very rare indeed, and the two former almost extinct, and were it not that the fox, the subject of these pages, happens, at present, to be the petted animal which provides for rich and poor the sport of kings, healthy exercise, and employment for thousands, and puts more money in circulation, directly or indirectly, than all the other wild animals in the world put together, he too—for, alas! he has many enemies—would, in our islands, soon become a thing of the past, with nothing to remind future generations of the bygone glories, delights, and excitements of the chase, save a few antiquated volumes in our libraries, or perhaps a dusty and moth-eaten mask or brush hanging in the ancestral hall!

FOXES AT HOME.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOX.

THE vulpine race is pretty well distributed all over the face of the earth, almost every country and climate has its fox, or foxes of sorts, though I believe the first of their kind, a dog and two vixens, were imported into Australia as late as 1864, and were purchased for the Melbourne Hunt by Mr. George Watson, a brother of the late sporting master of the Carlow and Island Hounds.

The Arctic regions have their representative with its lovely silver fur; and the sweltering African desert has three (or four) distinct breeds—a large red fox, something like our friend at home, which the natives call a "wolf," a long-legged, lanky, light-coloured, yellowish-grey fox, and the small "Fennec" about the size of an ordinary cat, though longer

in the leg, with large and almost transparent ears, and great round sloe-black eyes, which shine like those of a gazelle.

In Egypt proper, and round Cairo, the fox is very like the common English fox, and we hunted him there with a pack of foxhounds in the "eighties"; but the sport was poor, as we ran from one cotton field to another. There was no jumping and little or no scent, no matter how early one started; but, like "the Drag," it gave one an excuse for galloping over our neighbours' fields, which the "fellaheen" did not at all appreciate!

When quartered in the Palace of Zafferan at Abbassiyeh, outside Cairo, one could always, on looking out of the windows in the morning, see foxes lying under the orange trees and shrubs in the Khedive's garden underneath, but, as a rule, they were mangy brutes, and when disturbed either went to ground in the water-pipes under the road, or scampered away across the desert to the Mokhattem heights close by.

The Cyprus fox greatly resembles the large light-coloured animal of the Soudanese desert, evidently belonging to the same species, and I never saw any other kind in the island.

Here in the British Isles there were at one time three quite distinct breeds, the "greyhound," and the "bulldog" (or "mastiff"), the native foxes of the mountains, and what we may call the "common" or "ordinary" fox, or that of the vale. These three have from frequent importation and exportation become so intermixed nowadays that in most places they have lost their chief characteristics, and are hardly distinguishable.

The first mentioned animal is now practically only to be found, pure bred, in the mountainous districts of England and Scotland, though more common in Ireland, where fewer strangers have been introduced, and a stout hybrid is scattered pretty generally over the greater part of the country, as the greyhound often descends from the hills far into the plains, not only in search of food, but when "pairing," and there crosses with the lowland fox, to whose progeny it transmits, to a great extent, its strength and stamina, if not its size.

Frequently towards the end of the season, and also at other times, one of these hardy highlanders is found in the plains many miles

from his mountain home, for which he immediately sets his mask, and good indeed must be the scent, and rare the pack of hounds that can catch him before he reaches a place of safety.

I well remember a few of these occasions, runs which one dreams of for the rest of one's life. One instance especially, when the Ormond Hounds, finding near Kilrue, in the Nenagh part of their country, ran away from the field to and over the Devil's Bit mountain, many miles distant, where none could follow, and vanished in the mist. Mr. W. T. Trench was then the master, and, as we toiled up the mountain side in hopeless endeavour to catch up and stop the fast disappearing pack, the shades of evening coming quickly on, we suddenly became enveloped in a fog so dense that one could not see one's horse's head, and we thought it more prudent to descend until we should reach some road or lane along which we could proceed with safety. We could hear hounds running hard far away up in the heath, until finally the cry died away and was lost in the distance. Hounds did not return to kennel till the following morning, when they all turned

Charles Reid, Photographer, Wishaw, N.B.

A "BULLDOG" FOX.

up without one missing, but we never could ascertain if they eventually killed their fox. I, personally, arrived home at 12.30 a.m. that night on a very tired horse!

A splendid specimen of the vulpine tribe is the greyhound fox, the largest and stoutest member of his race, long, limber, and grey—a wolf on a small scale—the brush not quite so bushy as that of the ordinary fox, and with, as a rule, only a few straggling white hairs at the tip, his grizzly mask, when obtained, being a trophy of which any huntsman may well be proud.

The "bulldog" is quite the reverse of the greyhound, a short-legged, very dark, thick-set fox, whose dusky coat is flaked with white, black underneath, broad head, very short dark snout (hence his name!), on which is a small white patch, the brush as a rule tipped with black, his whole appearance giving the idea of strength rather than speed, whilst the greyhound combines both. These foxes are mostly found in the mountainous districts in Wales, but I have no doubt they exist elsewhere.

The "common fox" is an animal which does not require much description, every child

knows, or ought to know, what he is like. This species has not the same length of limb

A GREYHOUND FOX.

or size as the greyhound, and therefore lacks to a great extent the latter's speed and

stamina, nor has it the strength of the bull-dog; however, it is the most graceful animal of the three, its whole body being a picture of activity and suppleness, and though far inferior in pace to the greyhound, it is surprising how quickly, and without apparent effort, it can, for a certain distance, draw away from even the swiftest foxhound, and with what wonderful dexterity it can at times, if surrounded by hounds, extricate itself from, as it were, the jaws of death.

The natural and preponderating colour of the common fox is a yellowish red, with light ashy throat and belly, though in some districts this shade varies to a certain extent, as the colour of wild animals, like that of many birds and insects, assimilates itself more or less to its surroundings—a kind provision of Nature to hide them from the sharp eyes of their enemies. However, in many places, owing to the change of blood introduced by foxes of different breeds being imported from elsewhere, and turned down to increase the stock for hunting purposes, the colour of the common fox assumes a variety of shades, and the old characteristic almost disappears. One

sees in the same district red, grey, sandy, sooty, squirrel, and mouse coloured foxes; some with white tags, some with black, and others with no tag at all at the end of their brushes. I remember even a pure white fox being killed at Wentworth (the Countess de Morella's, near Virginia Water), by the Garth Hounds, some years ago, but this of course was a most rare occurrence, though, strange to say, another white fox was killed elsewhere that very same season. Cubs of the same litter are almost invariably of the same shade of colour, usually that of the vixen (or female fox), and the "dog" cubs, as a rule, have the large white tags at the end of their brushes. Vixens sometimes have them also, but it is the exception; they usually have no tag at all, or merely a few white straggling hairs, and of course many dog foxes have none either.

It is surprising how people differ in their ideas of the colour of a fox. How often has one heard the same fox viewed over a ride, or in front of hounds, described by different observers as being a dark fox, a light fox, a red fox, a sandy fox, with a large tag, with a small tag, and so on—really quite bewildering; so

much so that if you had not seen the animal yourself, and known there was only one, you might easily have imagined that half a dozen foxes were on foot!

To some people *all* foxes seem alike; they only realise that they *are* foxes, though really many are as different as one hound in a pack is from another, and every fox has some slight peculiarity by which he can be at once distinguished, and which those who are accustomed to view them take in at a glance. Every whipper-in should not only be *able* to do this, but *do* it, and then how often would the fatal mistake, which one so frequently sees out hunting, of halloaing hounds on to a fresh fox, be avoided!

To distinguish the "sex" at sight, especially at a distance, is not quite so easy, and the most observant persons may at times be deceived. Vixens have their peculiarities, some of them rather difficult to describe, though easy to notice; they are smaller, carry their brushes less jauntily, and hold their heads higher when cantering along, much finer in the neck, and narrower across the forehead and between the ears than the dog, and when they stand and

look in your direction, especially if alarmed, the latter form with the snout the letter V, those of a dog more like a W.

There are occasions when at a distance or moving quickly it is most difficult if not impossible to tell for certain. I remember a first whipper-in of many years' standing, and who, by the way, is now a huntsman, viewing a fox to ground almost under his horse's feet, and when the hounds arrived he told the huntsman that it was "a great large dog fox." Spades were obtained, and digging went on for an hour or two, only to find on getting to the end of the hole that the "fine dog fox" was a lanky "wet vixen" (*i.e.*, vixen with cubs laid down). On another occasion a sporting parson, who also knows a fox when he sees one, stated that the hunted fox which passed close by him was a "wet vixen." "She was so close that I could see her dugs," he said to me in a hoarse whisper. This I thought a difficult thing to do, if not quite impossible; however, he was a parson, and had to be believed. Shortly afterwards the hounds, despite every attempt to stop them, killed this wet vixen, which turned out to be "a fine dog fox"! But the mistake is excusable.

Many people aver that the "smell" of the fox, which greatly resembles that of the root of "Crown Imperial," is "peculiarly offensive." I do not agree with them at all; not that for a moment I would like to put "essence of vulp" on my handkerchief going to a dance or a dinner party, out of consideration for others, who perhaps do not take as great an interest in the little animal as I do; but I must say that when walking through the country, or by the covert side, a "whiff" of a fox is particularly refreshing! One immediately thinks of fox-hunting, pleasant scenes and happy days, past and in prospective, and the cares and worries of this wicked world go out of one's head for the time being, and one might say with Somervile:

> "Where are your sorrows, disappointments, wrongs,
> Vexations, sickness, cares? All, all are gone!"

Yes! there is many a worse smell than that of a fox!

The scent of a fox is supposed to be secreted in a *subcaudal* gland close to the root of the brush. There is, however, on the *back* of a fox's brush, about two or three inches from where it joins the body, a small bare patch,

about the size of a sixpence, the position of which is usually indicated by a tuft of dark hair. This is the seat of a gland, from which (according to Linnaeus) an ambrosial odour is diffused, probably to counteract the other!

While on the subject of scent, perhaps I may be pardoned for a slight digression. How difficult it is to explain this extraordinary invisible connection between the nose of the hound and the animal he pursues, or to fully comprehend that exquisite sense of smell which enables the one at times to follow the other with a precision as unerring as if in view.

"Should some more curious sportsman here inquire,
Whence this sagacity, this wondrous power
Of tracing step by step, or man or brute?
What guide invisible points out their way,
O'er the dank marsh, bleak hill, and sandy plain,
The courteous muse shall the dark cause reveal.
The blood that from the heart incessant rolls
In many a crimson tide, then here and there
In smaller rills, disparted as it flows,
Propelled, the serous particles evade
Thro' th' open pores, and with the ambient air
Entangling mix, as fuming vapour rise
And hang upon the gently purling brook,
There by th' incumbent atmosphere compressed.
The panting chase grows warmer as he flies
And thro' the network of the skin perspires;
Leaves a long streaming trail behind, which by

The cooler air condens'd remains, unless
By some rude storm dispersed, or rarefied
By the meridian sun's intenser heat.
To every shrub the warm effluvia cling,
Hang on the grass, impregnate earth and skies.
With nostrils op'ning wide, o'er hill, o'er dale
The vigorous hounds pursue, with ev'ry breath
Inhale the grateful steam, quick pleasures sting
Their tingling nerves, while they their thanks repay,
And in triumphant melody confess
The titillating joy. Thus on the air
Depend the hunter's hopes."

The "courteous muse's" explanation seems as good as any other, but how difficult it is to say with any certainty when there will be a good scent, though often easy enough to foretell a bad one.

There are one or two things, however, which can be relied on to indicate whether the scent will be good or bad.

If, on going out of doors for the first time on a hunting morning, the cold wind meeting you in the face sends a sharp needle, as it were, into the tip of your nose, bringing tears to your eyes, you need not expect the run of the season that day, as there will be absolutely not an atom of scent!

When hounds find late of an afternoon, just as a hard frost is setting in, I mean a frost that

eventually keeps hounds in kennel for days and weeks, then there will be a *burning* scent and a brilliant run, provided fox and daylight last long enough. The roads, however, will be pretty slippery on the way home!

I have no faith in the "southern wind and cloudy sky" theory, having known the loveliest southern breezes and cloudiest of skies on days when hounds could not go out of a walk!

Whyte Melville's "Galloping Squire" must have considered himself uncommonly lucky when he found a good scent "While the dewdrop is melting in gems on the thorn!" 'Tis seldom so, or when one sees them glistening on the cobwebs as one rides to the meet.

If when sitting in the saddle you can wind the fox yourself, the scent is rising, and the hounds are unable to feel it, but yet how often on an occasion like this, when hounds are almost at a standstill, has one heard "Young Brimful of Ignorance" (as Mr. Jorrocks would describe him!) remark: "What rot this is! Why I could almost hunt the fox myself! Can't you wind him?" and so on!

Different foxes have different scents, some

much stronger than others ; and hares likewise. The quicker you can keep the animal moving, the better the scent ; this is partly why, I fancy, with a sinking fox the scent so often fails, as he jogs slowly along he leaves little scent behind, but if he races so will the hounds.

It frequently happens when hounds strike the line of a fox that they hunt back to his kennel in preference to going on with the forward scent. This is caused by the fact that the fox had started quickly from his lair, leaving a steaming track behind him, but had slackened his pace later on when he found no immediate cause for hurry ; the scent in consequence decreasing with the slower pace. Again, one sees a fox stealing *quietly* away from covert, with hounds, perhaps, close behind, only just able to acknowledge the line ; presently a halloa, or some other cause, makes him increase his pace, and when hounds arrive at this spot they race away as if tied to his brush.

I remember when hunting our regimental pack of beagles many years ago at Aldershot, hounds coursing a beaten hare in view along the towpath of the canal, and the poor brute as a dying effort turned sharply into the burnt

gorse which lined the path, and crouched amongst the naked stems close to where I stood.

"Ah! there she lies; how close! She pants, she doubts
If now she lives; she trembles as she sits;
With horror seized."

The hounds overshot the mark, but soon returned and drew the gorse carefully up and down, passing close to where the hare lay, partly concealed under some withered bracken; one of the best hounds in the pack actually ran her nose along one of the stems, within a few inches of the hare, and then passed on. Seeing hounds could make nothing of it, I eventually went into the gorse and poked the hare with my whip, for doing which a lady who was present called me a horrid, heartless, beastly cruel *wretch!* The hare was quite *dead* and stiff, and all scent had suddenly ceased with the poor little animal's life.

"Stretched on the ground she lies,
A mangled corpse, in her dim glaring eyes
Cold death exults, and stiffens every limb."

And yet, although I have hunted them myself for many years, and thought it splendid sport and the perfection of hound work, I now almost agree with the lady.

"Poor is the triumph o'er the timid hare."

Foxes, as a rule, prefer to kennel above ground, selecting some retired place where they can rest undisturbed; their bed being round like that of a dog, and they are particularly fond of gorse coverts, especially natural, or self-sown ones, where each bush is like an umbrella, dry underneath and thick overhead, which last for generations without being touched.

The worst of an artificial, or hand-sown, gorse is that it is generally planted too thick, and, although it forms a splendid resort for foxes for some years, is most difficult to draw, or if of large extent to force a fox away from. In good soil it soon becomes rampike and thin overhead, and requires to be *burnt* (not cut) every six or eight years. When this is done the burnt stems should not be removed, as they help to shelter and protect the young shoots.

Rhododendrons are an excellent cover, and have the advantage over gorse that the older they become the better cover they are. Reeds round the edges of lakes, withy beds, tussocks in bogs, where they can curl up high and dry, although almost surrounded by water, pollards, old oaks and other hollow trees, they are very

FOX IN POLLARD.

partial to, frequently laying up their cubs in the latter.

When foxes are much hunted and the coverts constantly disturbed either by hounds or otherwise they will lie to ground if possible, and when pairing the dogs will lie up with the vixens, but when the earths are stopped continuously they will often lie out in the open on a dry fallow, in kale, mustard, or turnips, and in hedgerows, especially towards the end of the season, if the fields are unfrequented. In this way many a good fox evades the hounds for the greater part of the season, and a fox found in the open is almost sure to be a good one.

Foxes dislike bracken, and only use it as a shelter in the heat of summer and autumn when it is quite dry underneath, and, in the case of cubs, close to their earth. It is usually very damp lying, and when decaying most destructive to scent.

In some districts foxes are frequently found curled up on the branches of large trees, many feet from the ground, and it is marvellous the height they can jump or fall down, with impunity, like a squirrel or cat.

I remember Mr. Garth's hounds finding a fox

some years ago in Ashley Wood, near Birchetts Green, and running him hard towards Maidenhead Thicket, when he turned sharp left-handed just in front of hounds and headed for Hall Place past the chalk pit close by. As we came down the road we saw him running along the top of the pit on the very edge, and when at the highest part he either slipped or jumped over, and down he went into the pit. After falling about twelve or thirteen feet he struck a slight projection, which turned him completely over, but he immediately extended his legs and brush, like a squirrel, and landed with a "flop" on the hard bottom of the pit, rebounding quite two feet. We all thought he was smashed to atoms, but not a bit of it, he was on his feet almost immediately, and went and lay down in a corner, where he was eventually killed by the hounds, our difficulty being to keep the latter, running with a burning scent, from dashing over the edge of the pit, when many of them would undoubtedly have been killed. The fox must have fallen some sixty or seventy feet I should say, if not more, and I am sure if he had been given a few minutes to recover his wind he would have been all right;

he was only for the moment knocked a little out of time.

Foxes, when unmolested, will frequently kennel quite close to human habitations, and where they can see persons passing to and fro all day. The ivy on the top of an old garden wall is a favourite place. They even take up their quarters in covert close to the walls of kennels, where hounds are removed from them by only a few yards, and where the constant baying does not seem to disturb them in the least. In fact, when they know that hounds or dogs cannot get at them, they treat them with the utmost contempt, and I have over and over again seen their tracks in the snow pass within a few feet of where a most savage dog was tied, and where the latter had evidently been straining hard at the end of his chain to get free, whilst Reynard trotted unconcernedly by. Some years ago I remember Mr. Garth's hounds finding a mangy fox in the pleasure grounds at Heckfield Place, Swallowfield, and after running him hard for some minutes he just managed to escape their jaws by climbing over the high wire fence which surrounds the

ornamental water there, disappearing into some rhododendron bushes. Whilst we were wondering how to get him out, he suddenly emerged from a clump of shrubs, and sitting down on the gravel path, within full view of the field, commenced coolly and unconcernedly scratching his ear, whilst a couple of hounds bayed frantically at him from outside the fence not a dozen yards away, of whom he did not take the slightest notice, but, after having his scratch, trotted away along the path, and came out of the enclosure of his own accord on the far side.

The agility of foxes is quite remarkable, this fox ran up the wire netting as if it were nothing, whilst it effectually stopped the hounds. In Ireland the large deer-park walls here and there are of the greatest service to hunted foxes, when they are able to place them between themselves and the pack.

Talking of foxes and deer-park walls reminds me of an occasion, many years ago, when, in the Ormond country, a fox escaped over the deer-park wall at Prior Park just in front of the hounds, one or two of whom, however, managed to get after him. The celebrated

"Tony" Cashen was then the huntsman, and he, Lord Rossmore, and Mr. Burton Persse for many years master of the Galway Blazers were alone with hounds. Someone must go on. Lord Rossmore rode at the park wall and got safely over. "What is at the other side, my lord?" shouted Tony. *"I am, thank God!"* replied his lordship, as he disappeared from view!

A fox hardly ever starts in search of food immediately on leaving his kennel; it is not until the witching hour of midnight, or in the grey of the early morning, after perhaps having been many hours on foot, that he begins to think it is time to satisfy the cravings of hunger. A vixen with cubs, however, will prowl about in search of food at all hours of the night, and day also, if in a lonely place. She generally leaves the vicinity of the earth where *her* cubs are, undisturbed, in order, I suppose, that they may have something to hunt close at hand, when they are large enough to play about or follow their mother. This does not, however, prevent another vixen from poaching on her preserves, which frequently happens, when many litters are about. An

instance of this occurs close to my house at the present moment.

There is a litter of cubs within 150 yards of one of the gatekeepers' cottages on the Royal Military College estate, and the vixen belonging to it brings them their food from a distance; the appearance at the earth of an occasional ornamental water fowl from the College lake fixing the direction she works in; whilst another from a litter right out on the heath purloins this keeper's "Buff Orpingtons," and it takes some time after she has made a successful raid to remove their tell-tale feathers from the vicinity of her earth, where they are easily discernible, and I fear there will be none left for the other vixen's cubs to practise on by the time they are old enough to hunt!

It is very interesting to watch the different effect which the approach of a fox has upon the ordinary rabbit, in the *evening,* or in the *early morning*. In the evening (unless it happens that a vixen has been working the ground, and picking up everything she can get hold of, at any time, for her cubs, which makes the rabbits rather wild) they take little or no notice, some sit up and stamp with their feet, or crouch

down, while others hardly take the trouble to scuttle out of the fox's way, and as soon as he has passed by all goes on as before; "out of sight out of mind" evidently being their motto, and they seem to know instinctively that at this time the fox has no design on their lives, not being on the look-out for food.

In the morning it is quite different. The instant Master Reynard appears the rabbits get out of his way with all possible haste, as foxes have a nasty habit of picking up any piece of food they can easily get hold of as they return to their kennels, carrying it with them, and burying it in some convenient spot for a meal on a future occasion. The rabbits know this habit well, and make themselves scarce in consequence, all the cheek and confidence of the previous evening having departed. I have seen half-grown cubs even bringing home large rabbits and burying them near their earths, their plump little bodies showing that they had already eaten as much as was good for them. When carrying food foxes will pass quite close without perceiving you, being prevented from doing so, perhaps, by the strong smell so near to their noses. Once I happened unfortunately to be

right in a fox's path, in some bracken, and had no time to get out of his way, so lay down and kept quite still, wondering how near he would come before he found me out. He almost trod on me as he went past, and I could easily have taken the rabbit he was carrying out of his mouth had I so wished. On another occasion I was standing behind a tree when a full-grown cub trotted up and buried a rabbit just at the other side of it, first scraping a small hole and then poking the rabbit into it with his little nose, finally covering it carefully with earth and moss. Immediately he had finished doing this to his satisfaction he evidently winded me, as he stared hard at the tree for a second or two and then hastily unearthing the rabbit bolted with it out of sight.

When a hungry fox, especially a vixen, gets into a hen roost or farmyard, she will frequently kill every fowl she can get hold of before being disturbed, removing as many as possible and burying them at a safe distance where she can return at her leisure to carry them away.

Many people aver that a fox will on occasion, say, for instance, if caught *flagrante delicto* in a fowl-house, sham being dead in order to

escape, and I have heard numerous tales to the above effect, for the accuracy of which I am unfortunately unable to vouch.

Foxes are not polygamous for choice like the domestic dog, they stick as a rule to one partner, for the season at any rate. In a district, however, where the vixens are in the majority, one dog may take up with two (or perhaps even more), but when the dogs outnumber the vixens the latter will not admit of the attentions of more than one, and I do not think they select their mates, but that it is a case of the survival of the fittest, and that the weakest have to take a back seat.

I once saw two dog foxes and a vixen jogging along together in the morning, the rival suitors having a fierce "set-to" every now and again, whilst the vixen did not seem to care much which would be the victor. Eventually one got the worst of it, and followed behind at a respectful distance until the others went to ground in an open earth, when he retired to his kennel in some high heath and young fir trees close by, where he was found by the hounds that very afternoon, and killed after a short run. What hard luck! On the same day to be, first,

discarded by the object of his affections, then worsted by his rival, and finally eaten by the hounds. Was ever fate so unkind?

Rejected suitors and superabundant spinsters must therefore seek a mate elsewhere or go without, and as one sometimes, though very rarely, hears of a barren vixen, perhaps the latter alternative is the cause, as vixens are more "stay at home" than the dogs, which latter will often travel immense distances in search of a partner in the pairing season. When found by hounds on these occasions out of their country, they make straight for home, and frequently give the best run of the season.

Foxes begin to "pair" towards the end of December, but in parts where they are much hunted they seem to come together sooner and and have earlier litters than where they have been left in comparative quiet all the year.

Just as the glimmering landscape has almost faded from one's sight, when the voices of Nature are silent, and twilight deepens into darkness, the dog fox steals from his kennel in search of a mate.

"The conscious villain. See! he skulks along,
Sleek at the shepherd's cost, and plump with meals
purloin'd!"

In the daytime, jays, crows, magpies, wrens, and other birds proclaim at once the presence of a fox the instant he moves in covert, or when they catch sight of him in the open; but in the dusk a drowsy blackbird heralds his departure. There is no mistaking its well-known notes of warning: "Tuk! Tuk! T'wit, t'wit, t'wit, t'wit!" The rabbit sits up and stamps his foot, watching our friend as he passes by, with more of curiosity than alarm; the fox, however, turns a deaf ear to the one, and does not even condescend a passing glance at the other, but continues on his way, pausing occasionally and listening intently to ascertain if the coast is clear. At last, having apparently satisfied himself that all is quiet, he utters the peculiar bark which sounds so weird in the stillness of the night, three (sometimes four) short, sharp, little "yelps," repeated in quick succession, the last with rather a sad ring in it, and pitched in a slightly higher key; and, if you are close enough at the time, you will hear a sort of rumbling in the throat preceding them, rather difficult to describe on paper. R–r–r–ŏw—gŏw ——gŏw————gŏw (ow sounded as in cow) is almost as near as one can get it, I think. And

this he repeats at intervals until at last an answering cry is heard in the distance, not a bark this time but a "squall"; rather resembling the peculiar screech a peacock frequently utters when, like "Gabriel Junks" of immortal memory, foretelling the approach of rain—ā—ā——ā—ow is something like it in print! This is the cry of a vixen, and call and answer are repeated until the happy couple meet, and jog off together side by side.

Foxes seldom bark in the summer months. If they do it is not a good sign and looks as if a member of the family were missing—having come to an untimely end.

In Ireland the common belief amongst the peasants is that a fox only barks when in the vicinity of a farmhouse, in order to ascertain if there is a dog about, who would, of course, immediately reply; should no answer be returned, then Reynard knows he may rob the hen-roost with impunity!

A vixen, when once she has paired, keeps all other dog foxes at arm's length—what an example of conjugal fidelity for weak mortals!—and should a stranger be run to ground by hounds in an earth in which she happens

to be lying up at the time, he is either driven out at once, or compelled to remain at a respectful distance. How often, when digging out a fox late in the season, has one found on getting up to him that he could have gone in much farther had he so chosen; this is almost a certain sign that there is another fox, invariably a vixen, at the end of the hole. Had the dog been her mate, they would be found both together as far in as they could possibly squeeze themselves.

CHAPTER II.

CUBDOM.

FOXES breed only once a year, and the period of gestation is about nine weeks, the same as that of the dog. But, unlike the dog, foxes "consort" together right up to the time of the vixen laying up her cubs, and even after that happy event the dog hangs about, though he does not often put in an appearance.

Some weeks prior to the birth of the cubs, the vixen begins to look about for a suitable earth in which to lay them up, and having selected a large rabbit burrow, or badger's earth, in some quiet place, where, if possible, the sun can shine on and into the mouth of the hole during the day time, she proceeds to clean, or "draw" (technically called "to work") it out, and, if necessary, to enlarge it. This "working" is done in the early morning.

When a vixen begins to "work" the earths

they should only be "put to" (*i.e.*, stopped in the morning) when the hounds are coming, especially if the vixen is growing heavy and inclined to lie to ground, as if earths which are used for breeding purposes are kept continuously stopped right up to the end of the season, as lazy keepers are so often inclined to do to save themselves trouble, not only are the vixens prevented from drawing them out properly, but they are frequently forced to lay up their cubs elsewhere in unsafe and perhaps unsuitable places, not to mention the risk of their being killed by hounds when unable to run. Moreover, foxes at any time, on finding the doors of their earths invariably barred against them, will often scrape into some large rabbit burrow just far enough to be able to lie to ground out of sight, and the coverts are therefore often on this account drawn blank. On more than one occasion I have known hounds mark a fox so close to the mouth of a rabbit burrow, into which he had scraped on finding the other earths stopped, that they were able to tear him out themselves without any assistance whatever.

One should not mistake the scratching of a

terrier at the mouth of a hole for the work of a fox; a dog always begins to scratch at the *top* of the hole, whereas a fox invariably works away from underneath. Thus the tendency of an earth made entirely by a fox is to run deeper and deeper, enlarged here and there to enable them to curl up or turn round, and earths in which vixens lay up their cubs year after year often run very deep indeed from the continually "cleaning out" process.

A vixen prefers to lay up her cubs in a single hole if possible, in order, I suppose, to avoid the draughts occasioned by many entrances, which make the chambers cold, and when using a large earth always sticks to one hole, and works into it right away beyond all the others, where the cubs can be snug and warm. The branch holes, however, have their uses later on, as they act as store rooms for all the superfluous food brought in by the vixen, thus keeping the main hole clear. These larders, however, after a while become so very offensive from decaying rabbit skins, wings of fowl, &c., which the cubs have been unable to eat, that the vixen has eventually to shift them to other quarters.

Vixens before laying up their cubs frequently

draw out several earths, finally selecting the one most suitable at the time, and shifting into the others later on.

In some districts vixens lay up their cubs in the open, in hollow trees, thick heath or gorse, and under faggot piles, and such like places; these, called "stub bred" foxes, are generally very strong and healthy. Two years ago, when

"STUB BRED" CUBS.

the hounds were drawing some high heath and young fir trees, near here, in the middle of April, a vixen, followed by a brace of tiny cubs half the size of a rabbit, crossed the ride in full view of some of the field; luckily the hounds were busily engaged with another fox at the time, so she was able to escape with her little treasures. I have no doubt these particular cubs were "stub bred," as there had been no litter in any of the earths in the neighbourhood.

A vixen makes no bed, and when in due course the little cubs arrive, which they do early in March (I have known them in February, but that is early, and the exception), they are laid on the dry earth. This is a wise instinct, as, if there was a bed of any sort, it would soon become foul and unfit to lie upon, and would probably give the little ones mange. The cubs are born blind like dogs, and remain so for about nine days. Tiny little sooty-coloured balls of fur they are shortly after they are born, and covered with a sort of down. They look *sweet* (as the ladies say), with their little round fuzzy faces, and dark blue eyes, with which they gaze on you wonderingly without any sign of fear. It was in "The Brownies" (I think?) that the

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THEIR FIRST APPEARANCE. (CUBS ABOUT FIFTEEN DAYS OLD.)

Owl said, "Kiss my fluffy face!" I am sure if a little cub made the same request no one could resist it! Vixens when they think they will not be disturbed lay down their cubs in most extraordinary and unlikely places. One has even been known to have her litter underneath the floor of the library in a gentleman's house, to which she had gained access through an old ventilating shaft!

The number of cubs in a litter varies from three to about eight or nine; five is the average, though three or four are common, whilst six and seven are large litters. In the spring of 1901 a vixen here had eight cubs, and last year the same vixen, I am certain, went one better and had nine in the same earth. But this is very exceptional, and I never care to see a litter of more than five, as the fewer there are the stronger they are, and it insures a healthy stock. In a very large litter there must be a few weakly ones, generally vixens, and these have to wait for their food till the others are satisfied, so they get the worst of everything, and have to put up with the scraps. A vixen, however, always errs on the right side in replenishing her larder, and, if she has five cubs,

generally supplies sufficient food for eight or ten!

The sex of cubs in a litter is very variable. I have known a litter all dogs, and another all vixens, but I think as a rule the dogs preponderate. In a five litter there are generally three (and sometimes four) dogs, just the reverse of a sparrow-hawk's brood, where the five young ones are almost invariably three hens and two cocks.

Foxes will not breed in confinement, at least I have never known an instance, although I have kept tame dogs and vixens together for the whole season without result, and as they were quite as tame as any dog and would follow me about and come at once at my whistle, fear could not have been a factor in the case. I have also known a tame vixen to be chained up for weeks in a covert full of dog foxes to no purpose, though an ordinary bitch similarly treated has often been successfully crossed with the dog fox, the whelps taking after their sire both in colour and habits.

It is not at all an easy matter at first to tell for certain when a vixen has actually laid up her cubs, unless you are lucky enough to listen at

the mouth of the earth just after they are born, when they can easily be heard crying and whining like kittens; after a day or so they keep very quiet, and sleep, I fancy, most of their time. A sure sign, however, that the cubs have been born for some days is when the entrance and bottom of the hole becomes beaten perfectly flat, like the capital letter D lying on its face thus ⊐! This is caused by the frequent passage of the vixen to and fro, her tracks as she straddles in being at either side of the hole, and none in the centre, thus differing from one much used by rabbits, which, owing to their tracks always being "down the centre," becomes more or less concave, thus O!

It does not do to bring dogs near earths where cubs are laid up, or to visit them too frequently, as vixens are sometimes very nervous and jealous, and will shift to another earth if they think their litters have been discovered, sometimes taking them clean away; but if one goes quietly up to within a few yards and then retires without in any way disturbing the earth, she will probably take no notice. However, it is always well to be on the safe side, and, if you know the cubs are in the earth

all right, to keep at a respectful distance, especially when they are in a safe place where you would prefer them to remain. It is easy enough to get her to shift if you wish her to do so.

Soon after she has laid down her cubs the vixen begins to stock her larder for their benefit, and, as a fox really gives very little milk, a juicy rabbit or chicken supplies this deficiency as soon as the cubs are able to partake of it, at a very few weeks old, and the remains of animals and birds of sorts are now frequently buried close by, which are drawn into the earth as occasion requires.

The variety of food brought by a vixen to her cubs is really astonishing. Rabbits, ducks, geese, chickens, pheasants, partridges, I have found a woodcock, moles, rats, mice—shrew mice they will kill and bring to the earth, but the cubs do not seem to care for them—squirrels, eggs, and the young of small birds, larks, &c., which build on the ground are frequently brought up alive in the nest.

Foxes in the olden days had the reputation of being great lamb killers, but this was when game and rabbits were much more scarce than in

Charles Reid, Photographer, Wishaw, N.B.

CUBS ABOUT THREE WEEKS OLD.

these days of over-preservation, and they had very probably to travel far for food. Nowadays they can find food easily enough in most places, and one does not hear complaints of lambs being taken, and personally I have never known a fox kill one. At home, when I was a lad, the shepherd used to put a daub of reddle round each lamb's neck as a preventive, although he informed me he had never lost a lamb by a fox, either reddled or otherwise; the tradition had, however, been handed down to him, and he was bound to keep it up! He also used to blow a huge Spanish bullock's horn every night to scare the foxes away, which sounded like a steamer in a fog, and must have amused the foxes immensely.

"Said the fox I like good music still,
And away he went to his den O!"

I have no doubt, where food is scarce and lambs plentiful, as in hill countries, that foxes will occasionally take toll, but stray dogs are more often the culprits, and the poor fox gets the credit for the depredations of the latter.

Rabbits undoubtedly are the favourite food of foxes; they must get rid of hundreds in a season, and farmers and others should be obliged to

them for doing so. In Ireland the magpies and rooks which are hung up in the fields as scare-crows are always taken if there is a litter hard by, and like gypsies and badgers, foxes greatly appreciate hedgehogs. I have only once known a partridge brought up to an earth for the cubs. I think the foxes keep these delicacies for themselves when they come across them; also their eggs, which they invariably eat when they have killed the sitting bird. In this neighbourhood they kill an immense number of squirrels, which abound in the fir woods.

There is no doubt foxes prefer "*fur*" to "*feather*." It may be because it is necessary for digestive purposes, and also it must be a nuisance plucking a bird when the feathers keep sticking in their mouths, but the fact remains that in the billet of a wild healthy fox fur will always be found. The food, however, which a vixen brings to her cubs greatly depends on what is easiest to catch on the ground she travels over at night when on the prowl.

I have known a vixen feed her cubs almost entirely on hens and ducks, varied by an occasional turkey, whilst another close by fed hers on rabbits and squirrels, with a very

occasional pheasant, which she had evidently come across by accident (I do not believe a fox ever goes out specially to look for pheasants or partridges, but finds them when searching for other food, and, of course, makes the most of its opportunity!), thus showing that, whilst the latter travelled the fields and woods, the former prowled round the farm yards and hen roosts.

Fish, foxes are very fond of, and I have found the skeleton of a pike which must have weighed at least ten pounds at an earth more than a mile from the nearest water, where it must have been blown on shore after a stormy night and then picked up by the fox. On the shores of Lough Derg, when I was a lad, I have often seen a vixen, in the grey of the morning, searching amongst the rocks after a blustery night for any fish which might have been blown in (which frequently happens), or the young of the waterfowl which nested on the lake—coots, moorhens, &c.—which may be added to the above list. Foxes also, are very fond of the ordinary beetle, the wings of which can be seen in every "billet."

The partiality of foxes for fish, on one

occasion to my knowledge, brought two of them to a sad end

A friend of mine whose coverts were infested with cats from a neighbouring village, not liking to set traps for these pests, lest he might catch a fox, ordered his keeper one day to poison a few salt herrings and to place them where the cats would be likely to find them. The result of doing so was disastrous, and the reverse of what he wanted, as in the morning a fine dog and vixen fox were found lying dead close to where the herrings had been put down, and which on examination were found in their stomachs.

That the dog fox will bring food and assist the vixen, on occasions, especially when the cubs are first laid down, or just before, whilst the vixen is lying to ground, is well known; afterwards they only occasionally seem to come near the earth. When the hounds are still hunting, however, they frequently lie to ground with the vixens and cubs.

A vixen had laid up her cubs in a wood close to my home, some years ago, and late one evening a neighbour, who lived near the covert, sent word to say he had just come across a wet

vixen dead close to his house, which he feared had eaten poison he had put down for rats, and he let us know at once so that we might save the cubs. A dire calamity this was, as it was the only litter we had; litters that year being few and far between. The keeper went at once and recognised the vixen, and returned by the earth, where there was no food of any description. He went again at daybreak to try and see the cubs, and found eight small rabbits and a leveret at the earth, which had evidently been brought up by the dog fox during the night. The cubs were, however, too small to eat them, and the second day after the death of the vixen we found five tiny sooty balls of fur nestling in the sun on the dead rabbits, trying to keep warm, and almost dead with cold and hunger. We immediately got some milk in a saucer and put it at the mouth of the earth, and also cut up some pieces of fresh rabbit for them. The five crawled back into the earth, but only three appeared again, and these eventually grew up fine healthy, strong foxes, and gave good sport, though, of course, not knowing the lie of the land as well as if the vixen had lived to show them the country.

The curse of Ireland from a foxhunting point of view is that any landowner can put down poison indiscriminately in the open, provided he first puts up a notice to the following effect at the nearest police barrack and chapel that he intends doing so :—" Take notice that the lands of ——, in the parish of ——, are heavily poisoned for the preservation of game " ; and destruction of foxes might be added ! Imagine the consternation of the foxhunting community should the above lands and parish be in the cream of their country !

It is only on very rare occasions, when watching in the evening, that one sees a dog fox come up to the earth where the cubs are, though no doubt he is somewhere in the neighbourhood.

When the vixen is very heavy, or has only just laid up her cubs, you frequently find rabbits and other food buried close to, and sometimes actually in, the mouth of the earth in which she is kennelled, and I am certain that most, if not all, of this has been brought there for her use by the dog, as she herself does not leave her cubs till some time after they are born, and just before the event is not, I expect, either in the

humour or condition to hunt! I have known the dog fox bring up and bury close to the mouth of the earth two young rabbits after the keeper had "put to" in the morning and stopped the vixen in, as the hounds were coming to draw the ground. He showed me the rabbits during the day and stated they were not there when he "put to" in the morning; in fact, one rabbit was within a few inches of the stopping. When the hounds left he removed the stopping, and on listening at the hole we could hear the cubs whining inside, evidently only just born. I remained till dusk, when I saw the vixen come to the mouth of the hole, look round, and then go back again, and, though I remained until it was quite dark, she did not appear again. In the morning both rabbits were gone.

The vixen, as a rule, remains in the earth with the cubs during the daytime until they are about three weeks or a month old, and she does not come out until very late in the evening, when it is almost too dark to witness her departure. A dark shadow appears at the mouth of the earth and immediately vanishes, as she goes straight away without a moments'

hesitation. Later on, however, when the cubs have grown stronger, she comes out earlier and has a good look round, frequently, before starting on her prowl, carrying into the earth some piece of food previously buried close by, in order to keep the cubs quiet and in the earth during her absence.

When the cubs are about half the size of a rabbit, which would be when they are about six weeks old or so (it is astonishing how quickly cubs grow), the vixen kennels outside, and returns to the earth at nightfall to suckle them. She does not then bring any food with her. As soon as she arrives at the mouth of the hole, the cubs, which have evidently been waiting for her just inside, rush out to meet her, tumbling over each other in their eagerness, and she suckles them at the mouth of the hole, sitting up the while, and keeping both eye and ear on the alert to detect any approach of danger; and should an observer, in his anxiety to get a better view, unfortunately expose an eager face to her sharp glance, or snap the rotten branch which invariably comes underneath one at the all important moment; or if the midges and mosquitoes, which are often most troublesome at

"AFTER DINNER REST A WHILE." (CUBS ABOUT SIX WEEKS OLD.)

this time of the year, persist in getting into his eyes and ears and under his cap, so that they *must* be brushed off, and to remain still is *absolutely* impossible, he is detected at once; the vixen disappears with the cubs into the earth, and all is over for that night, and he had better keep away from the vicinity of the earth for the next few nights, as vixens are sometimes very suspicious, and she may possibly shift the cubs elsewhere to some earth where it will be impossible to view them.

Long before the cubs can be seen actually outside the earth they come to the mouth of the hole to play or bask in the sun; one can then see their tiny claw-marks in the sand. When cubs are very young their claws stick out like those of an angry cat, and as they then walk on their toes the whole ground where they play and crawl about looks as if it had been scratched over with a small iron rake with teeth like nails. As they grow bigger, however, the claws sink back into the foot and almost entirely disappear, and this is one of the chief distinguishing points between the track of a small terrier and the "pad" (or footmark) of a fox. You can always see the print

of the toenails in a dog's track, but not on that of a fox, unless he is travelling very quickly or playing on loose sand; the latter, too, has a velvety or wrinkled appearance caused by the thick fur between the toes overlapping the ball of the foot. The pads of a fox are longer and narrower, and the ball of each toe much more oval-shaped, than those of a dog, which are broad and round. The difference, however, is much easier to see at a glance than to describe on paper. The pad of the dog fox, which is very small for his size, is much larger than that of the vixen, and the fore pad is larger than the hind one in both sexes.

When the cubs come to the mouth of the earth to meet the vixen they generally play about a little whilst she is there, but when she moves off return into the earth again. However, they soon come out of their own accord to play round the earth in the evening (and if in a quiet place also in the early morning and heat of the day), and this is the time, especially in the evening, to watch their gambols. Nothing can be prettier! Kittens are not in it with cubs for playfulness; they pair off and chase each other all over the place, bowling over and

chevying each other round every tree near the earth. They are especially fond of old tree stools, from which they soon scrape off the bark, and seem to eat the ants' eggs and other insects which they find underneath. Sometimes three or four stand on their hind legs together, and, putting their tiny paws round each other's necks, have a wrestling match; and I once heard a man boast that he had killed four in this position with one shot. Murderer! That man came to a bad end.

When the cubs are old enough to play out by themselves the vixen generally brings some food with her when coming to the earth in the evening; this, however, she does not always permit them to eat at once, but buries it close by, and should the little cubs, who watch her with great interest, scratch it up again as soon as her back is turned, which they frequently do, she re-buries it, and continues to do so until they finally leave it untouched. I have seen a vixen become quite angry when some cub, more persistent than the others, continued to unearth some piece of rabbit, after she had carefully buried it hard by, knowing that the cubs were then not hungry, and only meant to play with it.

However, whenever they become hungry they know exactly where to find the food, and this keeps them going until the vixen returns with a fresh supply, during the night or in the early morning.

In every litter there is always one cub, the largest, invariably a dog, who, in the vixen's absence, seems to take charge of the rest, comes out of the earth first, sits and looks about to see that all is safe and quiet, and then entices the others out to play by gambolling about the mouth of the earth, frequently running and looking down into it, as much as to say, "Come on, it is all right!" and then the others come out and join in the fun.

When the litter is in a very lonely place and there is no fear of human, canine, or other disturbance, the vixen will kennel out much sooner than she otherwise would, especially if there is some thick cover close by, where she can remain within easy call, as it were. When this is the case the cubs come to the mouth of the hole to bask in the sun when they are very tiny, about the size of kittens, as I expect they find it rather cold in the earth without their mother. Only yesterday (April 20th) I went to look at

an earth in a very lonely part, close to some thick cover, and found a small cub asleep, quite five yards from the earth in the long grass; he was about the size of a rat, and I thought at first he was dead and that something had happened to the vixen. But, on picking him up, he opened his little blue eyes and stared at me with surprise when he found I wasn't his mother! I put the little chap back in the earth and went in the evening to see if the vixen would then turn up. She came all right and went straight to where I had found the cub, and searched all about for him before going to the earth; evidently she had found him lying about before! To-day he was out again basking in the sun, but wide awake this time, and after having a good look at me, when I came near he toddled to the mouth of the hole, and rolled down into it out of sight, but presently he poked his little head out of a different hole and had another good stare.

What strikes one with very small cubs is how out of all proportion their heads are to the rest of their body; this cub's head being fully a third of his whole body.

As soon as the cubs are large enough to eat

their food outside, the vixen shifts them to a fresh earth. This is about a fortnight or three weeks after they begin to play out. The first earth becomes dreadfully foul with the decomposing remains of the uneaten scraps of food, rabbit skins, etc. This is a very wise provision of nature, as otherwise the cubs would certainly become mangy from their filthy surroundings. She draws out another earth a day or two beforehand, or moves to one of those which she had originally worked, so that you can almost always tell, not only when she means to shift, but where she intends to shift to, and on finding they have left the earth they were bred in, go straight to where they are.

When a vixen shifts her cubs in the ordinary course they are always large enough to jog along with her, and it is astonishing how soon they can do this. A cub half the size of a rabbit is well able to follow the vixen a mile or more at a "go-as-you-please" pace. Should the vixen, however, have to shift in a hurry, and the cubs be very tiny, she will carry them in her mouth. When shifting any great distance they often make use of a convenient rabbit burrow as a sort of half-way house to rest at for a

night or two, and then move on again. Mangy vixens shift their cubs much more frequently

VIXEN CARRYING CUB.

than healthy ones; the former are always restless and on the move.

I remember once a vixen had shifted with her cubs, which were nearly as large as hares, to another earth nearly three-quarters of a mile distant but one refractory cub, the head of the itter, remained behind. We were not aware that she had actually moved, though we knew where she intended going, and passing close to the earth one morning very early stopped to see if the cubs were playing out. A single cub was playing by himself on the earth, throwing rabbit skins into the air and catching them before they reached the ground and other antics, and we were wondering where the others were, when the vixen came up and tried to entice this cub to follow her, trotting away a few yards, and calling him, a sort of whining bark right down in the throat; he followed her once or twice for twenty or thirty yards, but then scampered back to the earth again and went on with his games. At last the vixen could stand it no longer, but rushed at him, and, seizing him by the back of the neck, trotted away with him in her mouth, his little hind legs dragging on the ground, and she never once put him down as long as we could keep her in sight with our field glasses, quite two or three

hundred yards along a ride. That evening I went to the earth we expected her to shift to, and in the direction of which she had gone, and the cubs were all there right enough, including our refractory friend of the morning, who seemed now quite reconciled to his new home!

On another occasion a vixen shifted her cubs when they were very small, for no apparent reason, and we could not make out where they had got to, and searched every rabbit burrow within a three-quarter mile radius in vain; however, as the keeper and I were returning home along one of the forest tracks, having given up in despair, fearing that something had happened to the vixen, and that the cubs must be dead in the earth, we saw a heap of something like a lump of peat in the middle of the ride, which, as I passed it, seemed to move, and out of curiosity I went to look at it to try and account for this phenomenon, when lo! half-a-dozen little blue eyes peered at me out of the heap, and here was the missing litter of no less than seven cubs! There was a small rabbit burrow by the side of the ride five or six yards away, where the vixen had evidently left them, and, feeling cold, they had crawled into

the middle of the ride and huddled up together in the sun. The very tiniest little things they were too, and as they looked half starved I sat and watched them (as they were on one of the most frequented rides in the forest where horses and dogs might have passed by at any moment, and how they had escaped till then seemed a miracle) whilst the keeper went to fetch a rabbit, and having shot an old doe heavy in young, the first he came across, we quickly paunched her and, giving the unborn young a slit with a knife, threw them still warm on the little pile of cubs. The change was instantaneous! The little innocent-looking creatures of a moment before became suddenly transformed into struggling demons, and they worried the little rabbits just like a pack of hounds breaking up their fox, and growled and flew at each other till the last particle had vanished, when they sniffed about for more. After we had given them a real good meal we put them back into the rabbit burrow, and watched till evening, when to our joy the vixen came up and took them away into the heather with her, the little mites which we thought could hardly crawl running along with her like so many little

rabbits, and we did not find out where she then shifted them to till many days afterwards.

When cubs, on first coming out to play, or occasionally in the interludes, keep looking in any particular direction, you may be quite certain that that is the point from which the vixen usually comes up, and if you should happen to be in that direction you had better get out of it as quickly as you can, as if she finds you your amusement is over for that night at any rate; even if she does not shift the cubs, which she may very probably do. Anyone who has once heard the squall of a startled vixen close to his ear will not soon forget it. At her cry of alarm—W—ā—ā—ow! W—ā—ā—ow!—the cubs usually vanish (though once or twice I have seen them not take much notice until she preceded the above cry by the ordinary note of warning, which she gives when they are very small, and when she is with them on the earth—"Oof!" "Oof!!" it sounds like). She then circles round the unwelcome visitor and continues the squalling long after he has taken his departure. It is astonishing the distance to which the sound will carry on a still evening. One evening lately I sent my small boy to

watch one litter whilst I went myself to another over a mile distant ; just at dusk I heard a vixen squall in the direction he had gone and when we met afterwards to compare notes I asked if the vixen I had heard was squalling at him. He blushingly confessed that she had been, but that she had come right on top of him as he watched the cubs at play, and he hoped I would not hear her.

Once in order to see a litter of cubs at play I had to climb to the top of a very high fir-tree, and whilst in this precarious position, watching them intently through my glasses, the vixen suddenly and unexpectedly squalled at the foot of the tree, and I nearly dropped from my perch. So I mention this as a warning to others, if ever similarly situated, to sit, or rather hold, very tight.

When a vixen comes up to the earth to her cubs she does not remain for more than a few minutes and then goes off in search of food. When watching cubs, therefore, it is much better to wait till she has gone right away before attempting to retire, as, if within hearing, she will detect you at once.

As the cubs grow larger, about the size of

hares, the strongest follow the vixen about in her midnight rambles, and I expect she then teaches the young its first lesson in hunting. When they become tired they stop at the nearest earth, and either remain there till the vixen comes for them the following night, or work their own way home in the early morning, when I have frequently met them, and followed them without being seen for perhaps a mile; the little things stopping to rest occasionally at some convenient rabbit burrow, where they could easily take shelter in case of danger. I have also frequently been watching a litter of, say, five cubs, and only three have put in an appearance; and I have been wondering what can have become of the other two when presently the vixen made her appearance, bringing them along with her. Seeing cubs in this way at different earths, keepers frequently try to persuade one that they have two or three litters, when in reality there is only one. You must know how many litters you have *before the vixens begin to shift*, as after that it is most difficult, if not quite impossible, to tell.

As the summer advances the cubs all get together again, and the earths are more or less

deserted, although they kennel in the bracken and thick cover, close to some secure place in case of alarm. You can then only detect their whereabouts by watching at night or early morning, or by finding their "playground," some little bank or ride, which they wear quite bare by their nightly or, more correctly speaking, early morning gambols. At night they are more bent on food, but in the grey of the morning they always have a lark together before turning in for the day.

It is quite common to have rabbits and cubs in the same earth, especially if it is a large one, but I have also seen them in a single hole, which evidently had branches inside, where the rabbits could rest in security without the vixen interfering with them. Both seem to live in harmony till the cubs begin to get about the earth, when the rabbits have to clear out. When watching to see the vixen come out of an earth in hopes of getting a glimpse of the cubs, I have frequently seen rabbits come out first and go clean away, and later on the vixen emerge and do likewise.

I remember once seeing a vixen (in the middle of the day, too) sitting on a large rabbit burrow

in which she had laid up her cubs, literally surrounded by rabbits of all sizes, some not much larger than rats, within a few feet of her, grazing away quite happily, whilst she took not the very slightest notice of them. This was close to the shore of Lough Derg and in a very lonely spot. Presently the vixen trotted off and commenced searching for food amongst the rocks and sedges by the shore of the lake, returning with what looked like a moorhen in her mouth, which she at once took into the earth to the cubs. What struck me particularly was that the rabbits close to and actually in the same earth with the cubs took no notice whatever of the vixen, hardly troubling to get out of her way even, evidently having been left entirely unmolested by her, whilst those at a distance made themselves scarce the instant she approached.

I have never known two vixens lay up their cubs in the same earth, but have frequently known them shift into the same earth soon after doing so, or one vixen to shift into an earth where another had already laid up her cubs. The cubs of both litters get on splendidly together, and the vixens both suckle and feed

them indiscriminately, but when they again shift each takes her own lot with her.

Some years ago Charles Brackley, Mr. Garth's huntsman, wrote to me to say that one of the woodmen looking after part of the heath had told him that he had seen *ten* foxes together at an earth on his ground, and that the cubs were half-grown, and Brackley wished me to have a look at the earth to see what was really there. So that very evening, about 6 p.m., I set off, armed with my field glasses, and took up a position about fifty yards from the earth, which was in an old boundary bank, where I could see both sides, and the different entrances to the earth. About 7.30 p.m. a vixen came up to the earth on one side of the bank, and immediately four small cubs ran out and commenced suckling her, and presently another vixen came along the other side of the bank to be greeted by four other little cubs, and they were both suckling their cubs at the same time. In a minute or so two cubs left off suckling the first vixen, and running on to the top of the bank saw the other cubs with the second vixen, when they immediately rushed down to them, joined in, and commenced

suckling her along with her own cubs, whilst she looked down smiling on the lot, and did not in the least resent this seemingly very cool conduct on the part of the little strangers. One would have imagined she would have snapped at them and made them clear out of that, but not a bit of it, and when the cubs had done suckling, which did not take more than a minute or two, they played all together backwards and forwards over the bank. Just at dusk a fine dog fox came up and joined the happy family, and I was able to write and inform Brackley that I could go one better than the woodman, as I had seen *eleven* foxes, of sorts, at the earth together, but that the cubs were still very small. Another dog fox might have come up later on, as I had no reason to suppose the one which did come up was the father of both lots, especially as one litter had shifted from a distance of nearly a mile.

It does not do to put down food at an earth where there are cubs, either by way of assistance to the vixen or to entice the cubs out to eat it, as it may cause the vixen to shift them to another earth. As a case in point, I remember when quite a lad having shot a peewit; I

pegged it down in the middle of a ride where cubs used to come out to play from an earth at about thirty yards distance, in cover so dense that it was quite impossible to see them on it, and having done so I proceeded down the ride to a bend where I determined to watch till they appeared. On arriving at the bend and looking back I saw the peewit was gone, and hastily returning I found it on the earth, a cub having evidently taken it when my back was turned. I pegged it down again in the same place, but watched in vain till dark. The plover was gone next morning. I now got a live fowl and tied it on the ride, and walked backwards to the bend in the ride, but nothing appeared that evening, and the next morning the hen was alive and well. I then pegged it down *on the earth*, where the cubs, which I could hear in the hole, would have to brush past it on coming out, and early next day went to see the result—"The hen was still there, but the foxes were gone!" The vixen was evidently so frightened by my extraordinary and stupid (not to say cruel) behaviour that, expecting a trap, she shifted the litter out of a covert of over 300 acres to an old dry drain nearly two miles away, where they remained till old

enough to shift for themselves! And I realised then it was better to leave the vixen to cater for her cubs herself! Keepers often shoot rabbits and leave them near the earth for the vixen to find and bring to her cubs, hoping that by doing so they will save a pheasant or two This is a mistake. It is much better to let a vixen catch the rabbits for herself and to risk the pheasants.

The vixens remain with, and look after, their cubs right up to the cubhunting season, which usually commences early in September, though some packs start in the latter end of August. They are then almost full grown and well able to look after themselves—in fact, unless a very late litter, they are more or less independent of the vixen by the end of June or beginning of July. The old vixens now become very cunning, and it is extraordinary how they hide away for the greater part of the season, being seldom found by the hounds, and rarely showing any sport. They supply us, however, with the raw material, and that is all we should require of them.

A fox, if left to die a natural death from old age, would probably live for some twelve or

fifteen years; but in the present age, with his numerous enemies, I much doubt if, in sporting countries at any rate, many survive for even a third of that period!

When the morning dawns on November 1st every "cub" becomes a "fox," and from henceforth he has to fight the battle of life, trusting entirely to his own resources.

I once had a brace of tiny vixen cubs sent me by Joe Bowman, the huntsman of the Ullswater Foxhounds, which he had been rearing on a fox-terrier bitch. They arrived by *parcel post* in a *cigar box*, and were about the size of rats. They were too small, and I had to keep them some time before turning them down. One had a litter close by the following year, and the other about a mile away.

On another occasion a Scotch keeper sent me some cubs, and put the hindquarters *of the vixen* in the box for the poor little things to eat on the way down! Scotch keepers loathe foxes! I returned him the cubs, much to his disgust, substituting a couple of rabbits for their food on the return journey!

CHAPTER III.

TURNED-DOWN CUBS.

It is a great misfortune when, through circumstances over which you have had no control, it becomes necessary to turn down cubs, as they seldom show much sport the first year owing to their ignorance of the country, and, being half tame, often fall an easy prey to hounds. Should, however, your stock of wild foxes have become exhausted, something *must* be done, unless you wish to see your coverts drawn blank the following season—a calamity too dreadful to contemplate.

I may mention here that if mange, of which more next chapter, has been the cause of your scarcity, it is absolute waste of time and trouble, not to mention expense, to attempt to turn down healthy cubs until you have utterly destroyed every earth which could by any possibility have become infected, as the cubs are perfectly

certain to contract it from them in time, if not the first year, then the next, when all your labour will have been in vain. For two or three years here we spared the main earths and those in favourite places, stopping them for months, and trying to disinfect them, not liking to do away with them altogether lest the foxes might be driven off the ground. This, however, was a mistake which we had cause to bitterly repent later on. The infection will remain in the earths for *years*, so they should be *entirely* got rid of; the foxes will soon provide others, either by enlarging rabbit burrows or making fresh ones. Any fox on the ground, however slightly infected, should be also ruthlessly destroyed.

When wishing to obtain foxes to turn down, the proper method to pursue is to apply to the secretary of your hunt, who may know of litters which have to be shifted from other parts of the country, where perhaps they are not wanted, as there are always persons in every hunt who will never allow wild litters, or more than one perhaps, on their ground, and the fact of your requiring some may be a great relief to the worthy secretary's mind, as it is not always easy

to get a home for cubs which have to be removed in a hurry; but if there are none such he can furnish you with the addresses of Scotch keepers and others, from whom they can be safely obtained without the risk of despoiling another hunt.

Never answer advertisements in papers from persons having cubs to dispose of, or who can *supply them on short notice;* remember the fox-stealer is on the prowl when cubs are about, and has many agents to assist him in getting rid of his ill-gotten wares, and it is, I expect, rather a paying trade where foxes are plentiful. I remember at Eastbourne some years ago entering into conversation with an old man who wheeled a bath chair, and who after a bit became very communicative. He told me he used to earn many a sovereign by catching foxes every year, till old age and rheumatism forced him to give it up. He explained fully to me his *modus operandi*, very interesting (but which for obvious reasons I am not going to give here), and the country (a fox-hunting country, too!) which he worked; any foxes caught were left at a public house on the main London road, the landlord of which was always ready to give him from ten

shillings to a sovereign, money down, for every fox, young or old. He told me he caught a good number in the season, but "Lor', sir," he said, "they were never missed; they had lots of 'em!"

Turned-down cubs require to be fed on the very best. Keepers, as a rule, are most careless in this respect. Any vermin they shoot—hawks, cats, stoats, &c.—they consider quite good enough for the foxes, and failing vermin, butchers' scraps, sheep paunches, and other beastliness and unnatural food, from which they are most likely to get mange. If told they may shoot so many rabbits per day, where rabbits are preserved, the rabbits will be shot all right, and most likely eaten by the keeper and his family, the poor little cubs having to be content with the paunch; on the same principle as the Irishman who, when given some whiskey to apply to a bruised leg—

> "With the liquor wet his throttle
> And rubbed his shinbone with the bottle!"

thinking he was carrying out his instructions faithfully by doing so.

Improperly-fed and half-starved cubs,

although they look well enough for a time, will most probably develop mange the following season, and, having mangy litters infect the whole country, so that it behoves one, when turning down cubs, as your duty to the hunt, to be most particular, and, having given the keeper definite instructions as to how they are to be fed, to see that he carries them out. Remember that it is just when he is most busy with his young birds that the cubs claim his careful attention, and this is why they are frequently allowed to go supperless to bed, or to fill their little "tummies" with what cannot be good for them.

Fresh-killed rabbits should be put down every day in the evening, and cut in pieces to prevent squabbles at the rate of about one rabbit to every four cubs, when the latter are very small, and half a rabbit each later on. It is astonishing what an amount of food the little beggars will stow away, and as they grow very quickly they require plenty of it. At the same time the feeding should not be overdone, in which case they would bury what remains about the place, and probably eat it when quite putrid, which must be bad for them. An occasional fat hen or two

(where these can be spared) form an agreeable change in their diet!

No water is required, unless cubs are very young, as they seldom or ever touch it, though in exceptionally hot weather I generally put some down, whenever I felt thirsty myself! as I could not bear to think of them being likewise without any means of relief.

The best plan to pursue when turning down cubs is to select some rabbit burrow, sufficiently large for them to get into, close to a fox earth or other large burrow, in a secluded part of the covert where they are unlikely to be disturbed, and this should be surrounded with fifty yards of wire-netting, some six feet high, the lower part two-inch mesh, and turned in at the bottom for about a foot, the turned-in part being buried six or eight inches in the ground and well pegged down to prevent the cubs scraping out underneath, which they will endeavour to do the first night or two, and then ramble away and become lost. The cubs should be put into the earth in the middle of the day, and some food placed close to the mouth of the hole for them to eat as soon as they venture out, as after eating they are less likely to try and

escape, and usually commence playing about; in fact, I have seen them come out and start playing immediately they were put down, and it was only when tired with their gambols that they seemed to recognise their strange surroundings. The fifty yards of wire-netting allow a nice space for play; this, of course, could be restricted if the number of cubs turned-down is small.

The wire-fencing should be kept up for two or three days only, until the cubs become settled down and accustomed to the earth, and then quietly removed in the evening, placing the food near the holes as usual.

The cubs very quickly find out the neighbouring earths, into which they almost invariably shift, thus having the advantage of a nice fresh earth to live in, returning at night for their food to the old earth, where it should be put down regularly every evening.

It is a great mistake to keep cubs shut in too long, as the earth soon becomes very foul, and they run the risk of contracting mange, by being forced to live in an unclean earth, from which the vixen would soon have shifted them in their wild state.

Cubs soon begin to forage for themselves especially if there are plenty of rabbits about but still a sufficient quantity of food should be given them till they are nearly three-parts grown. When, however, they begin to leave any lying about uneaten, or buried here and there, a certain amount can be knocked off with impunity, but it is always better to be on the safe side, as far as food is concerned, as owing to their rapid growth they consume a great deal. Here on the heath I fed them right up to the cubhunting, partly because rabbits were scarce, and by so doing I saved the neighbour's poultry and thereby the funds of the Hunt, and partly in order to keep them from straying away, so that when the hounds came they should be found close home for our own and the keeper's satisfaction.

Cubs turned down in small thick coverts soon get to know the country, and sometimes show good sport; but they are loath to leave large woodlands for their first (or the greater part of their first) season. Here in the forest, as the ground was more or less disturbed, they invariably shifted clean away, after being hunted once or twice, to some remote part, where they

were left in peace and quietness, and we had to consider ourselves very lucky if a vixen or two remained behind to reward us for our trouble with a wild litter the following spring. Out of eight vixens turned down one season there were only two wild litters on the ground the next, but these two gave one a good start, and we have had never less than three or four wild litters ever since (some eight or nine years), and this year (1903) there are no less than seven litters on the same ground. It generally takes two seasons at least to re-stock satisfactorily with foxes any district which for some reason or other has been entirely cleared out of them.

On one occasion, when there was only one wild litter here, of five very fine cubs, three very small ones, which had to be removed from another part of the country, were sent to increase the stock, and put down in the usual way, about half a mile from the earth where the wild litter was. The second night after the wire was removed the cubs disappeared; the food was left untouched, and the most careful search failed to reveal their whereabouts, so that eventually we had to give them up for lost,

being utterly unable to account for their mysterious and unaccountable disappearance.

One evening, shortly after, I went to see how the wild litter was progressing, and, to my astonishment and delight, at dusk out from the earth came the three little absentees, and lay down a few yards away, looking rather shy, I thought; presently the five large cubs appeared and seemed to take the greatest interest in the strangers, frisking round them and trying to coax them to play, which, however the others declined to do. There they were at any rate, safe and sound, and after a few days became part of the family. Evidently the vixen had come past the earth where the cubs were and they had followed her home. She reared them up with her own lot and saved me all further trouble.

The following year I had four small cubs sent to me to look after, and this year there were two wild litters; something, however, had happened to one lot, as there were only two cubs in it and four in the other.

A few nights after the cubs had been put down, and before the wire had been removed, the food was found untouched and the cubs

gone, but how they could have escaped was at first a mystery, until on careful search we found, where the netting had been fastened to a fir-tree which was growing slightly out of the perpendicular, one of the meshes (about four feet from the ground, where the netting was three-inch mesh) was pressed into a circular shape and two or three little red hairs adhered to the wire, showing where the cubs had climbed the netting by the tree, and squeezed their little bodies out through the same mesh. Whilst examining where the netting was fastened to the ground we noticed the track of a vixen in the soft earth outside; so, profiting by previous experience, that very evening I went straight to the earth where the nearest litter was and found two of the cubs there with the other four, and quite contented, as they were much of a size. I thought at first the other two must be there also, but the next night only the six put in an appearance, and I could see there were no more in the earth; however, the following night we found the two missing cubs were with the second wild litter, and apparently quite happy, although only half their size. Whilst I was watching, the two wild cubs trotted

away from the earth, round the point of a spur out of sight, and almost immediately they had gone the vixen came up from the opposite direction with a rabbit in her mouth, which the turned-down cubs immediately rushed up and took from her. After looking at them for a moment or two, she cantered round the spur after her own cubs and did not again return. Thus two years in succession the wild vixens took charge of the turned-down cubs, and I had no further trouble, and they were as good as wild litters. There is this danger, however: if the wild litters are tainted with mange, as they unfortunately were in this case, the turned-down cubs will only too soon, for certain, catch the infection. I strongly recommend anyone, therefore, who has to turn down cubs, to do so if possible close to where there is a wild, healthy litter; as the vixen belonging to it is almost certain to take them, or they to tack on to her. It does not do, however, to give the wild vixen too many to look after—six all told is quite sufficient for the one fox to feed—although, as I said before, the dog will frequently lend a hand. Dog foxes (and *vixens*, too) often disappear unaccountably in many localities at the end of

the hunting season, so it does not do to trust too much to their assistance.

Beckford says one can put down cubs at once in the earth with a wild litter, and perhaps the vixen will take to them, but I think this too risky, as if she smells your hands on them she may kill them, fearing a trap of some sort, and the safest plan is as I have above described.

Turned-down cubs which have to be reared by hand unfortunately become very tame; they turn up punctually for their food, and if you should not be up to time will probably trot to meet you, or get into some position where they can see you coming, and then scamper on to the earth so as to be there when you arrive.

The food should always be put down *late in the evening*, the later the better, as otherwise it may be removed by dogs, cats, or other vermin, and the cubs have to go without. Another great disadvantage of putting it down in the day-time is that the cubs may be seen by outsiders, and they at once begin to imagine they are losing their fowls, and send in bills accordingly, and the poor fox (or the Hunt for him) has over and over again to pay for a duck or chicken which he never has had the pleasure of eating!

In order to insure the cubs being properly and punctually fed, I frequently took the food to them myself, as it has to be done, as I said above, at a season of the year when the keepers, as a rule, are very busy with their young pheasants, and are in consequence very apt to let the cubs wait, or slide altogether; or, in order to save themselves trouble, obtain paunches and other scraps from the butcher's, enough at a time to last a week or so. This is almost certain to give the cubs the mange. A vixen does not give her cubs sheep's paunch and butcher's scraps, and to be successful you must imitate nature as closely as possible.

There is nothing so good for a cub as a nice fat rabbit, fresh killed, warm if possible (not cooked!), and this should be cut into six or eight pieces, and scattered about the earth so as to give each cub a chance of getting a piece without either having to fight for it or to wait till the stronger are satisfied; but, even having done this, should any cub come up late (which, by the way, seldom happens), it would probably find the board swept clean, as the first cub, or cubs, up invariably collects and carries off as many pieces as it can possibly hold in its

mouth; and it is surprising how much one can carry at a pinch, bolting with it to a certain distance and burying it, returning immediately in case any has been left behind.

I remember seeing an amusing instance of this on one occasion when I had just brought the food down a little earlier than usual. A cub that had evidently been waiting came up at once and took away six or eight pieces of rabbit in his mouth, which he buried under a tree some thirty yards away, and carefully poked the earth over it with his little nose. He then returned and took away all the remaining pieces in the opposite direction. After he had got out of sight another cub came up and, after a hasty search round where the food had been, went straight to where the other cub had buried the first lot, scraped it up, and, sitting down, commenced to eat it as quickly as he possibly could.

Foxes always sit down or stand when eating, and keep looking about them all the time. You never see them lying down and gnawing at a bone like a dog. Presently the first cub returned, evidently winded the other, and, suspecting what was happening, rushed off to where he had

buried the food. On getting to the top of a little hillock, where he could see the other cub hard at work, he paused for a moment with such a funny expression of indignation on his little face, as much as if he said, "Well, I'm blessed if ever I saw such cheek!" and with his brush in the air, and a little snarl of rage, he dashed down on the offender, who, seizing as many pieces as he could carry, bolted right to where I stood a few yards away, almost running against my legs, and disappeared in the bracken behind my back. The pursuer saw me when he had come within a few feet, and stopped for a second or two, but after having a good stare he continued the chase, and, judging from the fierce scuffling I heard later on, evidently very soon caught up the fugitive, who had apparently stopped to continue his meal as soon as he thought he could do so with impunity.

On another occasion I had turned down two cubs—a dog and a vixen—the remnants of a litter which had been dug out and done away with on a neighbouring farm. They were rather large when I got them, and it is a mistake to turn cubs down when they are *too* old, as they are then more apt to stray away and be either killed

Charles Reid, Photographer, Windsor, N.B.

FORTY WINKS. (CUBS ABOUT SEVEN WEEKS OLD.)

or lost. It is also a mistake to turn them down too young, but I would prefer young to very old if I had to make a choice. About as large as a full-grown rabbit is a good size, as they are then fairly strong and active, but will not ramble farther from the earth than they can run back again in time to escape any passing danger.

The vixen, which was the smaller (as they usually are) of the above two, soon became very tame, but the dog was always a bit shy, and I think he would have gone off on his own hook had not his little playmate detained him close to the earth, from the immediate vicinity of which she declined, for the present at any rate, to shift. A rabbit was their daily food, but some water which I placed at the earth, as the weather was very hot, they hardly ever touched. One evening the keeper had omitted to obtain the rabbit (and this shows how necessary it is, if possible, to see the cubs fed oneself), and as a punishment for him I took one of his laying hens in default of the proper food. As it had to die I thought it would be good practice for the cubs to kill it for themselves! So cramming it into a ferret bag we proceeded

to the earth, where it was duly liberated. The hen stood on the earth and looked at her unusual surroundings with evident alarm, but made no attempt to run away, whilst we retired a few yards to see what would happen on the arrival of the cubs. Standing leaning against a tree, with the empty ferret-bag behind my back, it was suddenly snatched out of my hand, and looking round I saw the little vixen ("Joan" I called her, "Darby," the dog) dashing away with it in great glee. I had never heard her approach, and she only dropped it when she found it contained nothing better than a feather or two. Trotting back to the earth she and the hen stared at each other in evident surprise for several seconds, the latter seeming to be paralysed with fear. At last the cub rushed up and seized her by the tail, when the hen seemed to find her voice at any rate, and made such use of it that Joan dropped her and bolted, leaving the hen for the moment mistress of the situation. On a little hill just above the earth I noticed Darby, sitting smiling, and watching this strange performance with evident interest, but he would not descend to enter the lists with the

hen whilst I was there, and Joan would have nothing more to say to her, so after waiting a few minutes I retired leaving the poor fowl to her fate. I had only just got out of sight when a frightful screech from the hen told me something was wrong, and running back at once I was in time to see Darby disappearing over the hill with a whisk of his brush, and the hen in his mouth, little Joan scampering close behind. I suppose this was rather cruel, but it was most interesting, and I am sure the poor hen did not suffer much in the end, as foxes seize their victims by the back just below the shoulder blades, where one grip seems to kill them at once, and when devouring their prey they invariably start at the head and neck.

CHAPTER IV.

MANGE IN FOXES.

" . . . . Terrifick pest that blasts
The Huntsman's hopes, and desolation spreads!"

THERE are two kinds of mange. One a purely skin disease, where, although the hair drops, or rather is rubbed, off by perpetual scratching, the victim lives a considerable time, daily growing weaker and weaker from being always on the move.

The skin becomes very irritable and itchy, and the get-at-able places which the fox can bite and scratch soon become bare and patchy. The brush, as a rule, first appears ragged, then the sides, flank, and back show up bare, and, if the wretched animal only lives long enough, the whole body, except the head and neck, which seem to be affected last, eventually becomes devoid of hair and, in bad cases, covered with a scab almost thick enough to turn a charge of shot. A fine, healthy, well fed fox is a lovely animal to look at, but a real mangy brute, which

resembles a cross between a monkey and a rat, on a large scale, is a loathsome and miserable spectacle.

This skin disease is very catching, and the earths used by mangy foxes will, as I said before, infect others for a considerable length of time, and should therefore always be done away with.

Cubs of mangy parents, however slightly one or both may be affected, invariably get the disease, and, although in many cases it may not show itself until they are nearly full grown, I have never known an instance when they have escaped altogether, or a fox once mangy to become healthy again. They go from bad to worse, and it kills them in the end.

The other kind of mange is that which, in a more or less aggravated form, is transmitted by diseased parents to their cubs, and being *in the blood* it kills the victims much more quickly than the skin disease. It generally does not appear until the cubs are well grown, and then develops with great rapidity.

Starting just across the fox's loins the flesh rots away underneath the skin, which becomes a thick scab, and in very bad cases a mass of

worms, the poor brute's snout is eaten away, poisoned by the virus when attempting to scratch, and they must suffer awful torture before they die.

The hair does not fall off either on the body or the brush, but as far as one can see the coat looks perfectly healthy, save that just over the affected part it appears rather rough and the fur loses its glossy appearance. The instant the victim moves, however, it is apparent that something is wrong—the back is arched like a ferret, and the brush trails the ground. The gait is a painful hobble, not the elastic bound of the healthy animal: the eyes are almost closed, and, if near enough to notice it, the expression of agony on the face is unmistakable.

This disease soon prevents the sufferer from foraging for himself, and, when the cubs are deserted by the vixen, they quickly drop off from sheer starvation. I have never found food of any sort in the stomach of dead mangy foxes, but water, as if the poor brutes just before they died suffered from an unquenchable thirst.

When a mangy fox is discovered dead, it

should be at once buried, or better still burnt, as foxes, healthy or otherwise, have a nasty habit of rolling on a dead comrade, like a setter or spaniel on a decomposing rabbit or bird, and this, of course, helps to spread the disease. It is far easier to start mange in a district than to get rid of it, and if foxes were left alone to take care of themselves the disease would be unknown. Its origin can be traced in most cases to improper food and unhealthy surroundings. In many places where foxes are supposed to be strictly preserved and where cubs *must* be forthcoming in the autumn, if a large head of game is reared, the keepers have a trick of killing off the vixens (and dogs, too, for that matter!) after the season is over, and rearing up the cubs by hand, feeding them on all sorts of unhealthy and unnatural food. The earth in which they are located, owing to there being no vixen to clean it out, or, when foul, to shift them to another, soon becomes full of putrid and decomposing matter, the uneaten remains of the scraps on which they have been fed, and amongst which they are compelled to exist until almost old enough to look after themselves. It is then perhaps too late, and the disease has

probably got hold of them, destined sooner or later to show itself.

Some keepers declare that half poisoned foxes —*i.e.*, those which have picked up poisoned food, in insufficient quantity to kill them outright —contract the mange therefrom. But of this I have no personal experience as, unfortunately, all the poisoned foxes I have come across (which I regret to say have been many) had picked up quite sufficient to insure their never contracting either the mange or any other disease whatever!

In the neighbourhood of large farms where animals, especially pigs, are slaughtered, and the offal buried, sometimes quite close to the surface, foxes very quickly find it out and eat it. This is very injurious. Horse flesh too is very heating, and should invariably be hung up out of reach.

Damp earths, drains, &c., which hunted foxes use when they find their regular earths closed in the hunting season, are frequent sources of mange, as also are artificial earths, which, unless properly constructed, are worse than all the others put together, and suffice to infect the whole country side.

The roof of an artificial earth should be made so low that a fox cannot possibly stand up in it; many of them, however, have chambers two or three feet high, and these soon become very filthy and full of vermin. Mangy foxes use them as they can sit up and scratch inside, which they could not do in a natural earth, and they very soon become infected and remain so.

Mangy foxes are those which invariably do the greatest damage; they find a difficulty in procuring food, and starvation deadens their natural timidity. In broad daylight they will come and take a fowl right under one's nose, and if they can get into a hen roost will kill every bird they can get hold of; but so will a healthy fox, if pressed by hunger, when he gets a chance. Many attribute this to mere wantonness or to their love of killing. I do not, however, think this is so, but that the fox, being ravenous with hunger, fancies that he can never kill enough to satisfy it; in fact, according to the old proverb, his "eyes are bigger than his tummy."

Let *no one*, not even the M.F.H., the huntsman, the wife of your bosom, the person you love best in the world—and you are sure to be fond of somebody!—ever persuade you to give

a mangy fox, of any sort, even a vixen with cubs, however slightly tainted, a chance. *Kill them at once, destroy the litter and the earth,* no matter how disinclined to do so, otherwise you are only putting off the evil day and giving them an opportunity meanwhile of infecting others, and perhaps doing an irreparable amount of damage. And the worst of it is, the cubs of a mangy vixen drop off just when you want them for cubhunting, and it is then too late to substitute turned-down foxes instead. I can speak feelingly on this matter, as I had a bitter experience for a year or two, until I hardened my heart, shot the mangy vixens on the earth, killed the cubs, although the poor little things looked perfectly healthy at the time, and destroyed every earth that could by any possibility be infected. By this means I entirely got rid of mange on ground which had for years been notorious for its unhealthy foxes, so that for the last seven or eight years there have been nothing but beautiful healthy litters, where once two out of every three, if not the whole three, were infected.

Cowieson Read, Photographer, Wishaw, N.B.

A MANGY LITTER.

The following instance, amongst many which could be produced, will illustrate how useless it is to expect diseased parents to produce a healthy stock.

A vixen with a slightly ragged brush only, the rest of the body being to all appearance perfectly healthy, had a litter of seven cubs close by, and, although the dog fox was perfectly healthy, we thought the litter should be done away with, as the previous year a litter, also of seven, with what appeared to be a perfectly healthy vixen, but the dog fox in this case with a ragged brush, had all become mangy, and dropped off before the following November, and I feared this lot would only do the same. However, I consulted the huntsman on the subject, and he said we ought to give them a chance, as perhaps some of them might turn out all right; and, as we were rather short of foxes, I was then rather glad to comply, hoping against hope that perhaps the fact of the dog fox being healthy might make some difference.

During the month of July, to our chagrin, two or three of the cubs began to look patchy and soon dropped off, though three or four remained for some time, as far as we could see, all right.

We, however, picked up the last of them dead before the first of September. The vixen remained on for the best part of the season, when she, too, died; and I then registered a vow—No more chances for mangy foxes!

The next season there were only two litters on the ground, and, being naturally very anxious to find out what the vixens (which we had not seen the whole season) were like, I went one evening to watch at one of the earths, and, to my great disgust, out came what seemed to be a white fox—not a hair on her body except her head and neck—and jogged off. This was a sad blow—one litter out of two of no account, and I had yet to see what the other vixen was like! This one, however, was doomed to instant destruction. As we could not get near enough to shoot her on leaving the earth, and it was impossible to dig her out, three traps were set in the mouth of the earth, so that she could not possibly come out without being caught. At dusk that evening the dog fox came up—a splendid big fellow he was, too, with a fine glossy coat, and the wonder was how ever he paired off with such a hideous-looking vixen! However, as vixens were

scarce, I suppose he came to the conclusion a mangy one was better than none at all! He now suspected something was wrong, as he stole up to the earth and had a good look at where the traps were set, and then started back from them, and sat down and waited for a few minutes, but seeing that the vixen did not come out he eventually trotted away. We watched the earth for three nights, but the vixen would not come out, though we could see where she came up and scraped the earth back from the traps on the inside. On the morning of the fourth day we found the earth scraped away on the outside also, until the fox's claws had actually touched the traps; this could only have been done by the dog, and the traps now were high and dry on the top of a little bank of earth, over which the vixen must have jumped when she found she could do so with impunity. She came up to the earth that evening, but did not attempt to jump in, as it would have been almost impossible to do so without dropping her hind legs on to the traps, and as I did not want the poor little cubs to die of starvation (though I meant to do away with them as

soon as I could get hold of them!) I had the traps removed. She shifted the cubs immediately, and, as we could not find out where to, we feared she had moved right away and given us the slip for good, since vixens, when they get a good fright, will sometimes remove their cubs to a very considerable distance.

Whilst the traps were set at this earth I went to look at the other litter, which was about three-quarters of a mile distant from the first, and when the vixen appeared, although her brush did not look very grand, still her body appeared quite healthy. I was just thanking my stars that one litter at any rate was all right when she turned round the other side, and to my horror there was a huge bare patch on her ribs, the mark of the leper! which there was no mistaking! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What cruel luck! Now ladies can give vent to their feelings in tears, and a fit of hysterics comes in useful at times, to clear the atmosphere as it were, but what can a poor man do but swear, and surely this was enough to make even a saint swear! The thought of having to get rid of the only two litters one had got, to destroy all the earths, and to have to turn down

fresh cubs was really quite sickening. But still there was a bright lining to the dark cloud—the consoling fact that it *could* be done, and that it was still possible to repair the misfortune; not like the previous year when in September it was too late to do anything, whilst now it was only April. It certainly meant a certain amount of trouble; but of what account is trouble in the interests of sport?

Having made up one's mind how to act, the only thing to be done was to set about it as quickly as possible, so a night or two after the other vixen had escaped I went up to the earth to shoot this one, as it was a disagreeable task I would not allow the keeper to perform. Having taken up a convenient position at dark within easy range of the earth, what was my astonishment when out came the other vixen! She had shifted her cubs into the earth with the second lot. Poor brute! One felt like a murderer as one pressed the trigger, but she dropped like a stone without kick or struggle. 'Tis very easy to kill a fox. Two nights afterwards I got the second vixen, and then nothing remained but to get hold of the poor little cubs. "Brailsfords' traps, in

which you catch animals alive, were set at the earth, baited with a savoury rabbit's paunch, but it took a week to catch them all. There were three in each lot—one lot very small, poor, miserable little things, all vixens, the other three two dogs and a vixen —and we made away with them. Whilst the keeper was taking one of the strongest cubs, which evidently belonged to the healthier vixen, out of the trap in the grey of the morning it kicked up a frightful row, when suddenly down dashed a huge dog fox through the heath and thick fir trees, with all his hackles up, and danced round him, evidently thinking something was ill-using the cubs. This shows that foxes will fight in defence of their young. Though a magnificent large fox, almost the largest I have ever seen I think, he too was mangy, and the keeper shot him there and then, and we were lucky to have got him; but the poor brute deserved a better death. The dog which came up to the first earth we never saw again.

All the old earths were now destroyed, six brace of fresh cubs (eight vixens) turned down, from which we had two litters the following year. And we have never had a mangy fox or

a sign of one since, and that is eight years ago. As I write there are seven fine healthy litters on the same ground, a treat to look at.

In fine, from whatever cause it arises, mange is a terrible disease, and drastic measures should be used to eradicate it thoroughly the instant it appears.

"*Aux grands maux les grandes remèdes*," as they say in France!

CHAPTER V.

ODDS AND ENDS.

In the preceding chapter I mentioned the exceeding boldness, or rather recklessness, of mangy foxes, and that healthy foxes will, on occasions, be just as daring; as an instance of which I may perhaps be permitted to recount the following.

In the autumn of 1885 I happened to be quartered with my regiment on the top of Mount Troödos, Cyprus, and, having obtained a few days leave of absence, went on a moufflon hunting expedition with two or three brother officers to the Cedar Forest of Stavro, some forty miles distant. As there were no roads, only goat tracks, we rode on mules the two days' journey, and pitched our little camp in a deep glen in the forest, surrounded on all sides by high pine-clad mountains rising from our feet. An icy stream dashed down alongside the small

open glade in which our tents were erected, and disappeared under the ilex and lofty fir trees into the valley below—a spot lovely in its loneliness.

Part of our individual commissariat consisted of two or three live fowls, which were supposed to lay an egg for one's breakfast in the morning, or, failing that, to furnish our dinner, which latter meal usually consisted of roast chicken, eaten with the coarse brown bread, and washed down with the wine, of the country, a rough kind of claret, but excellent withal; raisins and almonds for dessert, with a glass of pink "mastic" to finish off with. Very good it was, though simple, and our appetites were excellent!

My hens were bad layers, and all but one had been converted into the evening meal! This little hen, however, survived, and always roosted just inside the door of my bell tent, close to the head of my bed.

One lovely night, as I lay awake looking through the tent door up the steep mountain sides (which shone like silver in moonlight bright as day, so that one could almost imagine oneself in fairyland, so sublime and peaceful was the scene), suddenly, from up amongst the

pines, came the well-known bark of a dog fox. It is strange what different sensations are awakened, or aroused, by the same cause under different circumstances. Now at home in the midst of civilisation the bark of a fox makes one immediately think of something wild and lonely, whilst here in the midst of loneliness it had just the opposite effect, and made one think of home and civilisation, pleasant scenes, and happy days. The occasionally repeated cry was listened to with the greatest interest, as it appeared to come nearer and nearer, until right down close to the camp, when there was a longer interval than usual, and it seemed as if the fox had been scared by the unusual propinquity of so many human beings, seldom seen in those parts, not to mention the presence of a large dog—half deerhound half sheepdog—which our shikari, Anastasis, had tied up in his tent, and which took no notice whatever of either vulp or his bark. However, we were quickly undeceived, and before one could realise what had happened there was a rush and a scramble at my very elbow, and out of the door of the tent dashed the fox with my little "speckelty hen" in his mouth, and one saw with dismay

breakfast and dinner fast disappearing into the shade of the forest. This could not be borne! and, regardless of *déshabille* (there were no ladies in the camp, however), quick pursuit was made up the mountain side, accompanied by every "hunting noise" one could think of in the excitement of the moment, thereby effectually awakening the camp, and bringing Anastasis and his faithful dog to the rescue. The result was most satisfactory, as, after going some distance, the little hen was found chucked into an ilex bush, more frightened than hurt, and as the huge hound bounded past on the line of the fox, urged on by the cheers of his master, we thought our friend, Master Charles, would have to put his best foot foremost, or he would be likely to repent bitterly having invaded the sanctity of our tent to gratify the cravings of his appetite. Still, he had some excuse, as little fat hens were not to be had every night in the forest of Stavro, and I returned to my tent with mine tucked carefully under my arm.

The rest of the night was spent in peace, but I believe I eventually ate that little hen myself! as, though the fright given her by the fox

seemed to have put her off laying, it in no way interfered with the delicate flavour of her flesh!

Foxes possess the senses of hearing and smelling to an extraordinary degree; one can hardly realise the immense distance they can detect the slightest sound, or wind one if favourably situated; their sight, however, is not as keen as one would expect, at any rate in the day time or dusk, and, if you remain perfectly still and happen to be down wind, and lying down or standing by a tree, a fox will often come within a few feet of you (as has happened to me on many occasions) without taking the slightest notice, although he may look you straight in the face.

Foxes jogging along a ride, when on the prowl, almost invariably with their proverbial cunning keep *close to one side or the other*, thereby being less conspicuous and able to get out of sight instantly if necessary. They seldom go down the middle of a ride for more than a yard or two, and then generally when hunted or disturbed, where putting a distance between themselves and the cause of

alarm is of more importance than keeping out of sight. In the forest here, they have a habit of running the rides when hunted, and when, being a certain distance in front of hounds, there is no cause for hurry or alarm; they find the rides much easier going than the heath, which latter is most tiring for foxes and hounds alike.

A fox has very little sense of fear, his proverbial cheek seems to more than counterbalance any innate timidity; even when hunted he is not in the least alarmed, and it is only at the very last moment, or when quite beaten and the hounds snapping at him, that he awakens to the fact that the business is more serious than he imagined. Notice the expression on the face and in the eyes of a hunted hare, or a rabbit pursued by a stoat; the agonised look in the dilated pupils show that they are almost paralysed with terror, and realise to the full extent their danger, whilst the elliptical pupil of the fox becomes more elongated, and the expression even more cunning, as he canters quietly along, rather enjoying himself than otherwise.

Foxhunting is undoubtedly the most merciful

of our pursuits of wild bird or beast, and those who condemn it on account of its supposed cruelty don't know what they are talking about. Hunted foxes have been known, over and over again, to snatch up a rabbit or a fowl, in sheer wantonness, when quite close in front of hounds, and if hungry and they had time would there and then have sat down and eaten them. Only recently with the Garth Hunt a cub came out of covert with a rabbit in his mouth, regardless of the fact that the hounds were close behind him in hot pursuit! Imagine a thrush when chased by a sparrow hawk stopping to pick up a worm!

Foxes have the greatest aversion to going under a gate, and to avoid doing so prefer to squeeze through the thickest fence. When one sees a hunted fox crawl under a gate, it is pretty evident that he is near the end of his tether, and, as Somervile says—

"Greedy death
Hovering exults, secure to seize his prey."

Foxes have a habit when on the prowl of fouling every rabbit burrow they come across, and this is evidently done with the object of making the occupants lie out. It is most

effective too, as how seldom, when ferreting, do we find rabbits in a burrow smelling strongly of fox.

I have once or twice come across a small cub dead, close to an earth, regularly mashed up and bitten all over by either a dog or a fox, and on one occasion quite a large cub with its head hanging by a shred only.

I am rather inclined to believe this must be the work of a strange dog fox, perhaps mangy, or the disappointed suitor of the mother of the cubs! I feel quite certain it is not a strange vixen, as, from what I have said above, it is manifest that vixens do not object to cubs other than their own, and their own fathers will not injure them, as I have on several occasions seen them with the cubs at the earth, when they seem to take just as much interest in them as their mother.

One vixen that I knew of had very bad luck in this respect with her cubs. She had a fine litter of seven, about the size of rabbits, and well able to take care of themselves in case a dog or anything suspicious came near them, and one day I found one of them lying all mangled in the mouth of the earth, only just

dead; it was in an out-of-the-way spot, too, where no dog was likely to disturb the litter. The vixen immediately shifted to another earth half a mile or more distant, and, after a few days, another of her cubs was picked up there, killed in the same manner. I think this must have been done by a dog fox. The fact, however, remains, that something will occasionally kill the cubs, and I am convinced it is not their parents. There are no badgers in the neighbourhood or I should have felt inclined to suspect them, though badgers and foxes are often known to live together in peace and contentment.

Talking of badgers, I once went on a badger hunting expedition into the mountains of Galway, to endeavour to obtain a few of these animals for turning down in a very large wood where the fox earths were becoming disused, and full of leaves and rubbish, the foxes seeming to have deserted what, at one time, had been their favourite breeding places, old badger earths, this latter animal having been for many years extinct in our immediate neighbourhood.

Having enlisted the services of a Galway mountaineer, who said he could "show 'my

honour' the finest badgers in Ireland," for each of which he was promised half-a-crown, which seemed to him a chance of making a fortune, we proceeded up the mountain side, and had not gone far when we came to a well-worked badger's earth, and the man started digging, every now and again putting his arm into the hole to see if he was getting near the end! On being asked if he was not afraid of being bitten when he got within reach of the occupants, he replied, "Is it bitten, your honour, why would I?" I certainly thought he showed a certain lack of intelligence by this remark, but perhaps he knew badgers better than I did, and if he was satisfied to risk his hand within a few inches of their mouths I didn't mind! At last, after some considerable digging, on stretching his arm to its full length, he gave a shout of joy (not unmingled with pain it seemed to me!), "Begor, I've got her at last, your honour!" and then began the tug of war. Anyone who has ever tried to draw a badger from its earth knows what a tough job it is, but nothing would induce the man to let it go until we came to closer quarters. "Is it to let her go you want me," he said indignantly, "and maybe lose my half,

crown; the divil a go she'll go as long as I've hould of her." And it was not until he got his other hand in and his knees against the earth, which I had opened a little farther to give him more room, that he at last succeeded in drawing a fine sow badger, which had him fast by the right hand, and we had some difficulty in forcing her jaws apart to get it free. The badger was placed in a sack, and wiping his bleeding hand on the "reverse of his corduroys" he once more thrust it into the hole, "For another half-crown, your honour," he said, with a smile. In this way we bagged five fine young badgers, and the man got his fortune, with a little in addition for the sake of his wounded hand, which did not seem to trouble him in the least, and he hoped "my honour" would soon come again, "long life to me!"

I put these badgers down in the wood, and, though they shifted to another earth, they eventually cleaned out every one, and the foxes returned and bred in them as before. So it was money well spent.

Foxes and dogs have a marvellous instinct by which they can return to their native place, though taken away to immense

distances, of which numerous instances are on record.

Some years ago a vixen and five cubs were dug out at Penny Hill Park, near Bagshot, and after a few days the six were sent away and put down in an earth on Bramshill Common, quite eight or nine miles distant. The next night the vixen brought two of them (they were about as large as hares) back to an earth in the forest between Broadmoor and the Royal Military College where I found them the following morning. Seeing the cubs had come into the earth in a hurry (as there was no attempt to draw it out, and it was full of leaves), and the only other litter in the neighbourhood not having moved, I went that evening to watch, and a dog fox came up to the earth at dusk, and sat with the cubs for a minute or two, but no vixen turned up, which is most unusual, as the vixen almost invariably comes up at dusk, and the little cubs, sitting at the earth after the dog had left, looked for her in vain, and I was rather afraid something must have happened to her. The next evening the vixen came up at the

usual time, and I recognised her at once as the Penny Hill vixen. We did not have many foxes in those days, and what we had we knew by sight, just as well as our spaniels.

After suckling the cubs, she lay down on the earth and went to sleep, evidently very tired. I have never seen a vixen do this before or since, as when they come up to the earth, as a rule, they have only just got out of their kennel, and go off on the prowl without delay. I had some difficulty in getting away without disturbing her. The next night and the night following she did not appear at all, and, though the keeper or myself watched regularly every night for weeks, she only came up on an average about twice a week. It struck me then that she was travelling to and from Bramshill, and I expected to see her turn up with the remaining three cubs every day, but they were either unable or unwilling to accompany her, and evidently the dog fox took care of these two, as they remained in the same earth till they were old enough to kennel out and look after themselves. I told Charles Brackley, Mr. Garth's huntsman, of this, and said I should not be the least surprised if he ran a fox from Bramshill to the Royal

Military College the following season, as the vixen would know the lie of the land, and would probably teach her cubs to work it. But he replied that in the many years he had been in the country (over thirty then) he had never known a fox take that line. However, strange to say, on almost the first (if not the very first) meet of the next season at Bramshill, he found a fox on the heath not very far from where the cubs had been turned down, and ran it past Castle Bottom, through Minley Manor, over the Flats to Darby Green, and across the River Blackwater, up the Rifle Range at the Royal Military College, to ground within some three hundred yards of the earth to which the vixen had brought back the two cubs; and this, I expect, is the line she brought them by, sticking to the heath until within sight of home. To have come direct by Finchhampstead and Wellington College would have saved her some miles. About a month or six weeks afterwards they found another fox, this time a cub, almost in the same place, and ran him the identical line till past Minley Manor, when I think they either lost or killed him. And no fox has taken this line since, nor ever will again I expect.

The only person with hounds in the above run, when they marked their fox to ground, was Charles Brackley, whose marvellous knowledge of the country and probable point of the fox enabled him to keep in touch with the pack when the rest of the field were brought to a standstill by the River Blackwater and the South-Eastern Railway!

Daniel in his "Rural Sports" gives the following instance:

"The old Duke of Grafton had his hounds at Croydon, and occasionally had foxes taken in Whittlebury Forest and sent up in the venison cart to London. The foxes thus brought were carried the next hunting morning in a hamper behind the Duke's carriage and turned down before the hounds. In the course of this plan a fox was taken from a coppice in the forest and forwarded as usual. Some time after a fox was caught in the same coppice whose size and appearance was so strikingly like that got at the same spot that the keepers suspected it was the fox they had been in possession of before, and directed the man who took him to London to inquire whether the fox hunted on such a day was killed or escaped. The latter having been the case, the suspicion of the keepers was strengthened. Some short time after a fox was caught in the *same* coppice, which those concerned in the taking were well assured was the fox they had bagged twice before. To be, however, perfectly able to identify their old acquaintance should another opportunity offer, previous to his third journey to town, he had one ear split and some holes punched in the other. With these marks he was despatched to London, was again hunted and escaped, and within a very few weeks was retaken in the

very same coppice, when his marks justified the keepers' conjectures, in spite of the seeming improbability of the fact. It is with some concern that the conclusion of this singular account is added, which terminates in the death of poor Reynard, who was killed after a very severe chase, bearing upon him the signals of his former escapes, and which ought to have entitled him to that levity and privilege which formerly was granted to a stag who had beat his Royal pursuers."

Foxes die very game; I have only known one instance of an old fox crying out when pinned by hounds, and that was in a gorse covert on a very windy day, where he was evidently caught napping by a couple of hounds, and he squealed just like a little pig. We could not imagine what on earth it was, and the master, the late Lord Huntingdon, rode into the gorse, when he found it was a fine dog fox, which the hounds killed in spite of him. Tiny cubs when handled will frequently kick up a frightful row!

Foxes are fine strong swimmers and, like hares, do not hesitate to take to water, when pursued by hounds. I remember many years ago, in the Ormond country, finding a fox in Kilgarvan gorse, and running him through Brocka to Kyleanoe Wood, the usual line, over the Ballinderry River, where it runs into Lough Derg at Drominagh Bay, the fox usually crossing by

a small footbridge. The hounds had come away on his back, and were racing him in view along the shore of the Lake; but when we came to the river we found that recent heavy rains had flooded the "callows" at the Gurthalougha side, making it nearly two hundred yards broad; the fox, however, kept on his old line, splashing through the water till it was deep enough for him to swim. Hounds and fox were in the water together, about thirty yards apart—an interesting and novel sight; but the fox drew away from the pack at every stroke, and finally landed on the far bank some fifty or sixty yards ahead. On getting out of the water he shook his sides and brush, turned and looked back at the hounds, then at the field, and then cantered quietly away up the bank, reaching Kyleanoe Wood a quarter of a mile in front of the pack and finally making his escape.

This fox calmly looking back at the hounds, after escaping from what we all thought was almost certain death, reminds me of the narrow escape of another fox from the very same covert on a previous occasion. We had drawn the hill blank, and were crossing a large grass field to the next gorse when a labourer asked Lord

Huntingdon to draw a small heap of stones covered with gorse and blackthorn in the middle of the field, where he said he had frequently seen a fox. His Lordship, ever ready to oblige, though he doubted much finding there, did so, and the hounds had no sooner dashed into the brake than they came out on the far side with a magnificent huge dog fox right in their midst. Under them, over them, through them he dashed, just missing their jaws by a miracle, and finally extricating himself from the pack, with about three feet start, he set his mask for the covert we had just left on the hillside some three hundred yards distant. I wish I could have timed the pace for that three hundred yards!

"Nor nearer could the hounds attain,
Nor farther could the quarry strain."

And so across the field they raced without a whimper.

"Silence, you know, is the criterion of pace."

"They'll have him at the edge of the gorse," the Master said, and evidently so the hounds expected, and closed on him as he neared the covert. However, the fox, with his ears laid back and his teeth bared as he cast a hasty glance on either side of him as much as to say,

"If you dare to touch me," manfully held his own, and his feet seemed hardly to touch the ground. As he neared the refuge the excitement was great, and we held our breath. But there's many a slip, &c. When within three or four feet of the covert side, the fox made a desperate bound and landed some twelve or fifteen feet in on the top of the gorse, into which he instantly disappeared with a whisk of his brush, whilst the pack went head over heels on top of each other into the thick outside edge, and a minute or two was lost before they got on the line again. Meanwhile in an open space, about a hundred yards up the hill side, our friend appeared, and, pausing for an instant, looked back on the confusion below. I am sure if he could have spoken he would have said "Sold again!" no doubt he thought it, and then, turning, he quickly disappeared into the scrub which crowned the top of the hill. We never caught sight of that fox again, but ran him to ground with a screaming scent some twenty minutes later in a cave near the once celebrated covert, Nannie Moran's Rock.

But there were real straight-necked foxes in the old Ormond country in those days, grey-

hounds, which required catching, and I often wonder if they are as good now. But 'tis many a year since in one's boyhood we viewed one away in those very, very happy hunting grounds, when the present master Lord Huntingdon was still a lad.

In many places the foxes of the present day are, I fear, very degenerated specimens of their race; there is something artificial about them; they do not seem to be able to go the pace and the distance of their wild progenitors, and their knowledge of country is also deficient. For a fox to make a ten or twelve mile point is now the exception, and the number of such runs in the season could, I expect, in most countries be counted on the fingers of one hand; whereas formerly they were of frequent occurrence, at any rate, in wild hunting countries not over-burdened with large woodlands. And one asks, "Why is this?" There are many causes, but I think we ourselves are mainly responsible for the inferior breed. Take the present system of cubhunting, for instance. In most countries hounds are taken to some covert (the smaller the better) where there is known to be a litter of cubs, with the object of

well-blooding the young entry and "smashing up" that litter. The covert is surrounded and the cubs held up till they are all more or less exhausted, and one or two, if not more, fall victims. I do not think this is either business or sport! The puppies are well-blooded no doubt, but I fear at the expense of many a good run later on in the season, as it is more than probable that it is the stoutest of the cubs that are brought to hand, the small and cowardly ones having quickly found safety in some large rabbit burrow, of which there are always many available. When this system is pursued on every occasion, most of the best of the cubs have been brought to book before the regular season commences, and if persisted in year after year, and only the worst left for hunting and stock, can it be a matter of surprise that the breed should deteriorate, as "like breeds like"? Why not, when the hounds have been round the covert once or twice, and a fair idea can be had of how many cubs are on foot, allow all those that wish to break away to do so, and then hold up and kill the laggards and cowards of the lot, and if they get to ground dig them out if

necessary. Hounds are much more likely to mark them to ground with only one or two on foot than if half-a-dozen are running under their noses all the time and foiling the covert. In this way it would insure the survival of the fittest, and the hounds would be blooded with the worst of the litter.

I think the ignorance of the country is mainly caused by the ease with which foxes can get their living in many districts, so that they have not to travel many miles in search of food. It is only towards the end of the season that the young dog foxes are beginning to know the country, the vixens mostly sticking close home. And, alas! how many of those dog foxes, just as they are becoming worth having, disappear unaccountably during the summer months, and never turn up again, every huntsman knows!

The pace at which hounds are bred to go nowadays has, of course, a great deal to do with the shortness of the runs. The long, slow hunting runs which our forefathers loved would not suit the "flyers of the hunt" of the present day at all! Five-and-twenty minutes on the grass without a check, and then "who-whoop," repeated *ad lib.*, is now the order of the day, and

to insure this the hounds are clapped on the back of the fox, if possible, as he quits the covert, and with anything of a scent he is burst up before he has got his second wind or even made up his mind which point to make for. Poor old Jorrocks, if he were present now and started "counting twenty," would find the hounds were in the next parish probably before he had finished! *Tempora mutantur!* and one has to keep with the times and the hounds, if *possible!*

CHAPTER VI.

TAME FOXES.

FOXES make most charming pets if taken when young, and I have had many at one time or another. They soon become perfectly tame, playful as kittens, and much attached to their master, though rather shy of strangers. I would, however, warn anyone intending to keep a fox as a pet that they will not bear being mauled, pulled about, and worried. They have very sharp teeth, and sometimes do not hesitate to use them, if irritated or much excited. I have never been bitten myself, but I know others who have, and severely, too. The late Lord Doneraile died from the bite of a tame vixen, but I think it was trying the poor thing rather highly to bring her with him on a "jaunting car" to the meet of the hounds, where naturally she would be very excited, and I believe it

was on such an occasion that the accident occurred which cost him his life. The fourth Duke of Richmond died of hydrophobia in 1819, caused by a tame fox, which never left him, having licked the blood off his chin when he had cut himself in shaving; which proves that hydrophobia can be given to a human being by an animal not itself suffering from rabies. Vixens (like our own fair sex) are much more gentle and affectionate, as a rule, than the dogs; but, also, they can be very "snappish" at times, if put out, and my advice then is "leave them alone!"

I once had a very tame vixen, which was given me when she was almost full grown, and she used to jog along with me when out for a walk, and hunt rabbits with my spaniels, manifesting the greatest delight whenever I came to fetch her for a prowl. She went through thick cover, heath, gorse, or bracken, like an eel through weeds, and a rabbit had to be indeed smart to escape her in the first few strides. The spaniels, who were perfectly free from chase, were much disgusted at what I suppose they considered her wildness and want of training, as whenever she went

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"DOLCE FAR NIENTE."

away in hot pursuit of a bunny they immediately came to heel, and looked at me as much as to say, "She deserves a good licking when she comes back." "Kitty" (which was her name), however, never either deserved or got a licking. She invariably on catching a rabbit bolted with it to some distance, and, having carefully buried it, immediately returned to look for another; one grasp of her powerful jaws and it was all over with poor bunny!

When I first got Kitty I always took her out on a chain lest she might run away, and I might not perhaps be able to catch her again, but more especially as she invariably wanted to run and have a game of romps with every dog she saw, and I feared some of them might resent this and injure her. After about a fortnight I dispensed with the chain, and let her loose inside a large enclosure surrounded by wire netting, where I could easily catch her if she became refractory; but only on one occasion had I any difficulty, as she always returned immediately I called her. On this occasion I had taken off her chain for the first time in the open, and she was cantering about quite contentedly, when suddenly some soldiers

appeared in sight, and evidently the red coats scared her, as, after staring at them for a moment or two, she bolted clean away, occasionally stopping and looking back, and then going all the more quickly. In vain I followed and called; she disappeared over a neighbouring hill, still going strong, and after looking for her all over the place till nightfall I had reluctantly to return home without her, thinking to myself "Good-bye, Kitty, I'll never see you more," and I felt dreadfully grieved, as I was much attached to the little animal.

Next morning I was out by daylight, and having shot a squirrel for her breakfast, in case I ever found her, which I considered most doubtful, as I feared she would for certain be lost in the forest, I went to where I had seen her last the previous evening, and taking up a position where a good view could be obtained began to call and whistle. Within five minutes, to my joy, I saw her coming bounding along over the heath, and she seemed as pleased to see me as I certainly was to see her, and jumping on my shoulder rubbed her face against my cheek like a cat. This was how she always showed her affection. I gave her the squirrel which she

immediately ran away and buried, and returning curled herself up between my feet, whilst I sat on a tussock, and to all appearance went fast asleep, as she seemed rather tired, evidently having been on the move all night. She remained thus for nearly an hour, as I did not like to disturb her rest. Suddenly she sprang up and, placing her fore-paws on my knee like a dog, looked over the heath in evident alarm, and presently I saw the keeper appear along a ride quite 300 yards away, so that whilst apparently quite sound asleep her senses were very wide awake. Foxes often sleep very heavily, especially after a hard night and probably a late meal, and in this way frequently fall victims to the hounds before they have time to get well on their legs.

I frequently took Kitty out ferreting, and she got to understand the business at once, and entered into the sport with great delight. She did not take the slightest notice of the report of the gun, but sat listening to the rumbling of the rabbits underground, and then placed herself close to the hole from which she expected them to bolt, and the instant they appeared she had them in her grip. I was always afraid the ferret

might appear first and trembled for the consequences, but she did not seem to mind the ferrets much. Once I hung the ferret bag, with a couple of ferrets in it, on the branch of a fir tree about seven feet from the ground and four or five from the bare stem, whilst I worked a burrow close by with others. Kitty heard the ferrets in the bag scratching and kicking up a row, and having spotted it rushed up the bare trunk, and, springing out, seized the bag in her teeth, wrenched it off the branch, and bolted with it at full speed, only being forced to drop it after a stern chase of about a hundred yards, when the ferrets were recovered unhurt.

I have never noticed Kitty, or a wild fox for that matter, ever attempt to catch anything by stealth, or to approach closer to her prey by crouching or crawling, like a cat would on a bird. Whenever she saw a fowl or rabbit fifty or sixty yards off she invariably went straight for it, and before the wretched victim seemed to realise what was the matter she was within a stride or two and then escape was almost impossible.

Foxes are frequently represented in old prints

and paintings as peering round a haystack at a flock of geese on a common, ducks on a pond, or perhaps over a bank at rabbits playing close by; they *may* do this, but I think it is more fancy than fact. It is seldom one has the chance of seeing a wild fox catch his prey, and when I have been lucky enough to do so they either rushed up at sight without the slightest attempt at concealment, or pretended to trot unconcernedly by, getting, in the case of rabbits, between them and the covert or their burrow, and then making a sudden spring when within a few feet of their victim, which they seldom missed. The first method is that usually adopted.

I was always most anxious to ascertain how it was that a fox, like a badger, could locate with such certainty the actual position of a nest of young rabbits, and be able to burrow right down on top of them, often many feet from the mouth of the hole. We have all seen the small round hole, some two inches in diameter, right over the nest through which the young had been drawn and devoured. Some thought the position was fixed by hearing, and others by smell, but, having found some rabbit

"stops," I took Kitty to show me how it was done, and her procedure in each case was always the same.

Having found the "stop," which I always allowed her to do for herself, remaining at a respectable distance, she opened it carefully with one paw, and then listened most intently at the mouth of the hole, one paw up, and the whole body perfectly rigid for several seconds, perhaps a minute, during which time she seemed to ascertain the direction of the hole; then she stole very quietly on a few feet from the mouth of the hole, and placed her ear close to the ground with the head at one side, like a terrier listening for rats, frequently turning round the other ear, and after a minute or so moved on farther until she eventually arrived exactly over the nest. Then she seemed to get very excited and started scratching as if for her life, and in a very short time had the young ones out, nest and all. When she got down to the nest she generally put in her paw and it seemed as if she was folding it round the young rabbits; she then pulled the nest out with her teeth, most of the young ones

coming with it, but she took care to search well for any left behind.

In the latter end of April in the year 1885, during the campaign in the Soudan, I happened one day, when on the march across the desert with my company, to pass by a fox earth in a heap of sand under some mimosa bushes, in which one could see there was a litter of cubs. When we halted for the day some distance further on and formed our "zariba," I called for a few volunteers to return to dig them out. It was a novel use for the "Wallace" spade—part of the soldiers' equipment—but after digging for about an hour we came upon two tiny little cubs about the size of rats, a dog and a vixen; there was another in the earth, but a fox terrier we had with us unfortunately killed it. These little cubs were not many days old, the sweetest little darlings, of a light-cream colour, with large dark eyes like a gazelle, very pointed faces, and little black snouts, their tiny brushes tipped with black—a species of the "Fennec" we ascertained afterwards. We brought them back to camp in triumph, and then came the question of how they were to be fed. A goat had luckily been looted from the

enemy whilst we were on the march, and I "commandeered" her for the foxes, who were placed in a small box in a bamboo orange crate about two feet square in a corner of my tent, where they seemed quite happy and comfortable, and not in the least frightened, staring at me with their great, large, wondering eyes whenever I went to look at them. The feeding process was at first rather slow. The goat had to be milked into one of the men's tin canteen covers, and in this I placed my hands for the little cubs to lick the tips of my fingers, for which I afterwards substituted pieces of bread, and in a very short time they ate the bread and drank the milk readily. I was now congratulating myself that my duties as wet nurse were over, when we got orders to march to the next zariba at Handoub, some ten miles further on, and I had to start at once with my company; but before doing so gave my servant the most careful instructions as to bringing on the foxes and goat with my baggage, which was to follow.

Some time after our arrival at Handoub my servant and baggage-camel hove in sight. On

one side were slung my gun case and the orange crate with the cubs, safe and sound; but, to my horror, on the other side I found the poor goat tied by the legs head downwards quite dead—and no wonder, after being carried in that position for ten miles! Oh, Tommy, Tommy Atkins, you are an absent-minded beggar, if ever there was one! This was a calamity! Now what was to be done? Luckily a tin of condensed milk was found amongst my subaltern's commissariat, and on this very indifferent substitute for goat's milk the foxes had to subsist for a day or two, until one morning I happened to have shot some sand grouse and tried them with their warm hearts and liver, which they flew on and gobbled like little demons; the very scent of blood seemed to alter their whole natures.

My work was now, however, easy, as I had only to shoot them a little bird every day, and give them an occasional cup of the condensed milk. They were duly christened "Jack" and "Jill."

In the burning days of midsummer, when the thermometer ran up to 130 degrees damp heat in the shade daily, and not less than 110 degrees

to 112 degrees at night, when men were dying with heat apoplexy and enteric two or three a day, and one was not allowed outside one's tent from 6 a.m. till 7 p.m., these little foxes became part of one's life; they were as tame as cats, about the same size, though longer in the leg. I taught them all sorts of tricks, and made a steeplechase course for them round inside my tent. The little things quite entered into the spirit of the game, and used to become so excited when they saw me preparing the fences; and when I let them out of the orange crate, went almost wild with joy. Round and round the tent they raced, one after the other, a dozen times, until they had had enough, and then they trotted up and put their little paws on my knee to ask for a drink of condensed milk and water, and submitted to be quietly returned to their crate. This was the daily routine until I was ordered to Cyprus in the end of July, and, of course, my little pets went to. When we arrived at the top of Mount Troödos, where we were quartered in that island, we found it dreadfully cold at night, almost freezing; and fearing the effect of the great and sudden change on the foxes, I got a strip of soldier's blanket for each,

and, cutting four little holes in it put their legs through and sewed it tightly over their backs. This they seemed to enjoy immensely, and never made the slightest attempt to divest themselves of their unusual covering, which they wore the whole time they were in the island. I brought them to England with me in the month of November, and, having no place to keep them, with much regret presented them to the Zoological Gardens, where I thought they would be well looked after. Unfortunately they were put into the same quarters as the common foxes, and a few days after I had a notification from the Secretary to say "Jill" had succumbed to the cold. He very kindly sent me her little skin, which I could not bear to look at, even. "Jack" was put into more comfortable quarters, where he lived for five years.

About a year after I had placed the foxes at the "Zoo" I happened to be in town and seized the opportunity of going to see how my little playmate was getting on. I found the poor little thing curled up in some straw in the corner of his house, with a lot of small boys peering at him through the bars and trying to attract his attention by poking in pieces of

biscuit and *orange peel* for him to eat. He, however, took no notice whatever of them. Having hunted the urchins away, I called to him through the bars, using the little coaxing expressions he was accustomed to hear in the Soudan, when he immediately raised his head, gazed attentively at me for some time, and then, getting up, came to the bars, through which he thrust his little snout and licked my hand, returning at once to his kennel and lying down again, whilst I retired with a lump in the throat and wondering how I ever could have parted with him. His little skin is now with "Jill's," but I do not like to get them stuffed, as they never can at all resemble the real little darlings which helped me to beguile the tedium of those gloomy days now long gone by.

There are men both good and wise, who hold
That, in a future state,
Dumb creatures we have cherished here below
Will give us joyous greeting, when we pass the Golden Gate.

Is it folly that I hope it may be so?

CONCLUSION.

HAVING now endeavoured to trace the daily (or nightly) routine of a fox's life from the hour of his birth till he is fit "to face the music" of the hounds, I leave his after career for abler pens than mine to describe, and in the words of the late Major Whyte Melville wish my readers—

Good speed, a good line, a good lead,
With the luck of the fence where 'tis low;
Not the last of the troop may you hear the Who-whoop,
Well pleased as you heard "Tally-ho."

APPENDIX.

GORSE COVERTS AND ARTIFICIAL EARTHS.

I honour the man, whate'er be his rank,
Whose heart heaves a sigh when his gorse is drawn blank.

IN order to keep foxes it is necessary to have coverts in which they can rest undisturbed, and, as already mentioned, it is difficult to beat the ordinary gorse, which is a favourite resort at all times and in all weathers.

How many gorse coverts do we know whose names are "famed" in the annals of fox-hunting as the starting point or finish of some of the best runs on record, not only in the good old times, but at the present day!

Gorse coverts may be classed under two heads, the "natural" or self-sown, and the "artificial" or hand-sown. The former, however, is much the better of the two, and,

though taking many years to mature, eventually becomes practically everlasting, whilst the latter, although often proving very holding and satisfactory when properly planted, requires occasional renewing to keep it up to the mark.

Natural gorse coverts are the result of scattered bushes having been allowed to grow without interference for years—one might almost say centuries—until the gaps between them became eventually filled up, the whole presenting from the outside the appearance of a solid and impenetrable mass of green. This, however, is not the case, the natural gorse is almost invariably hollow underneath, but the outside, from having for years been kept close cropped by cattle, especially horses, with the same effect as the frequent clipping of a hedge, has become desperately thick, and forms a weather-proof covering, under which the foxes love to curl up, dry and warm, sheltered from every wind and rain, and through which they can move with the greatest facility.

This hollowness of the natural gorse constitutes its special charm, not only from a vulpine, but from a sporting point of view. A

fox is less likely to be chopped when he can see clearly around him and has room to dodge his enemies, whilst hounds find it much easier to force him away; in fact, instances are on record when the crack of the huntsman's whip, or a note on his horn, has got an "old customer" on his legs and off, with a brilliant run the result. Whereas in a dense covert, through which he must force his way, the same fox might easily, on a blustery day, or when sleeping soundly after a late or heavy meal, have ignominiously fallen a victim to the pack before even having time to jump from his kennel.

It is a great mistake to cut a ride in a natural gorse. I have known a magnificent covert, which had never hitherto been drawn blank, completely spoiled for many years by doing so, and though the rides were eventually allowed to grow up, it never seemed the same again This gorse, about fifteen acres or so in extent, was quite ten or twelve feet high in places, so much so that when the rides were cut the huntsman could almost ride in under the impenetrable roof through the naked stems, some five or six inches in diameter. But the ruthless axe had let in the daylight, and one could see underneath

for yards in every direction, and the foxes lost their former sense of security, and shunned their hitherto happy home.

The owner tried to remedy matters by laying part of this covert, *i.e.*, cutting the stems of the bushes half through, and then bending down the heads, but this was not satisfactory; most of the heads died, the foxes never took to this part, and the hounds could scarcely draw it; and as time after time we sat in our saddles and saw them with difficulty trying to tread their way through the tangled mass, with nothing but rabbits scuttling across the rides, one felt it was indeed "Ichabod," and that the glory (as well as the foxes) had departed.

Verb. sap. Never cut a ride in a natural gorse, no matter how large; it is better to find a fox in it, though it may take some time to get him away, than to draw it blank!

The more you can make an artificial gorse resemble the natural one the better, so that it is an excellent plan if there are many gorse bushes about in a suitable situation—a rough piece of ground on the sunny and sheltered side of a hill, if possible interspersed with boulders and hillocks, and *without* rabbits—to assist

Nature a bit by filling up the gaps with gorse seedlings, bushy plants about a foot or eighteen inches high, digging holes and planting them just like any ordinary tree, but not *too* close; from three to five feet is not a bad distance, when not pressed for time and a lasting covert is required. It is extraordinary how quickly these plants run up, in some four or five years according to the soil; the time slips by without your noticing it, and you soon have your reward. This covert should *not* be fenced in, but cattle, horses, and sheep encouraged to graze through it and to crop the young shoots, thus making each plant thick and bushy and when they begin to approach close to each other the cattle will soon avoid going through the covert of their own accord.

With no cattle to crop the shoots and keep down the herbage around the young plants, they soon become either choked by the rank growth of grass or bracken or run rampike, and are easily destroyed by a heavy fall of snow.

Some years ago we planted two coverts as above, but unfortunately one had to be fenced, the consequence being that that left open, though taking longer time to mature, was just

coming to its prime when the fenced covert had to be burnt, having been beaten down by a heavy fall of snow, and rabbits got in and destroyed the young shoots in the following spring, the thick, stunted bushes of the other being regardless of rabbits and weather alike.

If there are no wild gorse bushes on the site selected for the covert, it can be made entirely of seedlings, but the wild bushes protect the latter, and seem to help them on, whilst you do not notice the nakedness of the land so much, or think the gorse is taking an unconscionable time to grow. "A watched pot never boils," they say, nor will the gorse seem to grow if you are always looking at it.

In case gorse plants are not procurable, recourse must be had to seed. The ground must be tilled, and fenced with wire netting if there are rabbits about, and the gorse seed sewn *broadcast* with corn, oats for choice, to shelter the young shoots.

Irish gorse seed, which can be obtained from Messrs. Sutton, Reading, for about 2*s.* 6*d.* a pound, is by far the best and hardiest, and plant about 15 lb. to the acre. We once put 30 lb. per acre, but it was too thick: the gorse

plants ran up like corn, and the second year, though holding foxes, it was almost impossible for the hounds to draw, and very tiring for them. A huntsman does not like to be left on foot in the middle of a dense jungle, up to his waist, when the hounds go away with a good fox, and this might easily happen if he had to dismount to try to induce them to face a too thickly sown three-year old gorse. This covert held splendidly for five or six years and then was completely killed by a heavy fall of snow, the rabbits, of which there were many about, absolutely declining to allow the young shoots to grow again.

April is the best month to plant the seeds in, and no manure is necessary, though, if the ground is very poor, some artificial top dressing, such as superphosphate of lime, *after the seeds have started* will help them along.

Artificial coverts should be of sufficient size to admit of a part being burnt about every eight years or so, or even more frequently—it depends on the soil and the consequent rapidity of growth of the plant. *Never cut the gorse*, it bleeds. *Burn it;* leave the naked stems to shelter and protect the young shoots, and keep

out the rabbits, and in about two years' time the burnt part will hold again.

In order to avoid the risk of destroying the roots by the fire when the gorse is not very high and the soil light or peaty, it is well to select a dry day with a fairish breeze, and to burn down wind; the flames will then run quickly through the heads of the bushes and leave the roots untouched. A high rampike covert in a stiff soil should be burnt against the wind or on a calm day.

About Christmas or early in January is a good time to burn the gorse, before the sap gets up, this gives the plant time to recover from the shock, and the young shoots get the benefit of the fresh ashes.

If burnt too late in the spring the budding of the young sprouts is retarded, and, moreover, weeds of all sorts spring quickly up, partially smother them, and prevent them spreading.

If possible do not sow gorse seed where there is bracken, as the latter will soon run up, and not only smother the shoots but spoil the covert by keeping it damp.

Artificial Earths.

In a fox hunting country and where rabbits are plentiful it should seldom be necessary to have recourse to artificial earths; it is much better to trust to Nature and let the foxes make shift for themselves, which they will invariably do, if the coverts are kept quiet, either by enlarging some rabbit burrow or, should the soil be light or sandy, by excavating on their own account; the former course is, however, the usual one, especially when the holes run deep and dry.

Artificial earths, if not properly constructed, may easily become a plague spot in the country side, as, unless *perfectly dry*, they are very apt to give mange to every fox that uses them, or, should fox-stealers be about, by acting as traps in which they can be easily captured; they should, therefore, not be resorted to unless in extreme cases, such as, when having no natural earths on one's own ground, an endeavour must be made to induce those foxes which breed on that of a neighbouring vulpecide to come where they will be safe, at any rate until the litters begin to break up, and the cubs to look after

themselves, when they are not so easily get-at-able or exterminated *en masse*.

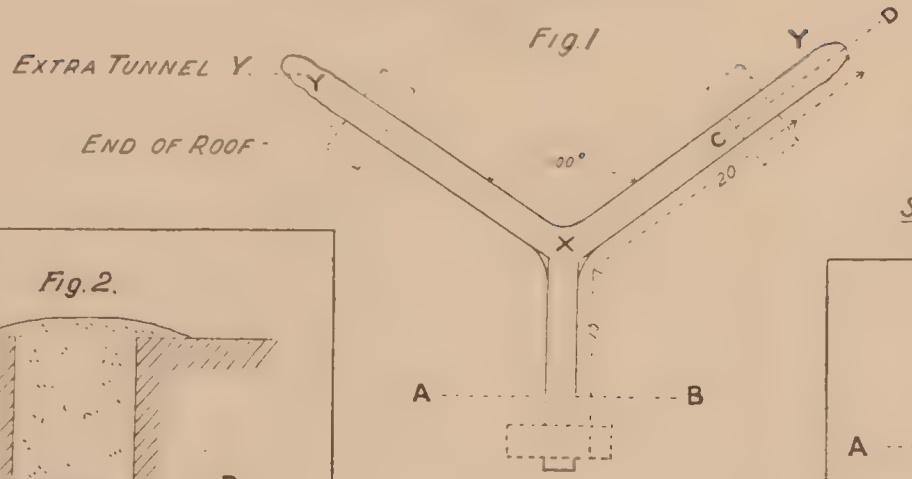
It is necessary to use a certain amount of judgment when selecting the position for an artificial earth. It should either be in an open glade in the covert or some very secluded spot in the open, if possible on the side of a hill or gentle slope (being more likely to keep dry than if on the flat) facing south, and where the warm rays of the sun will strike down on, and into, the mouth of the earth all, or the greater part of, the day, especially about noon, as, when the vixen is lying out, the cubs, even when very tiny, love to come to the mouth to bask and sleep in the sunshine.

Natural earths, especially in sandy soil which is easy to burrow into, as a rule run very deep, so, when there is no danger of the earth being damp, do not be afraid of digging down. Artificial earths are, as a rule, made much too near the surface. Let "*deep and dry*" be your motto. The shape of the earth, too, should be considered, and the holes should be straight, to enable the vixen to clean them out without difficulty; those formed like the letter Y are generally most satisfactory, and only one

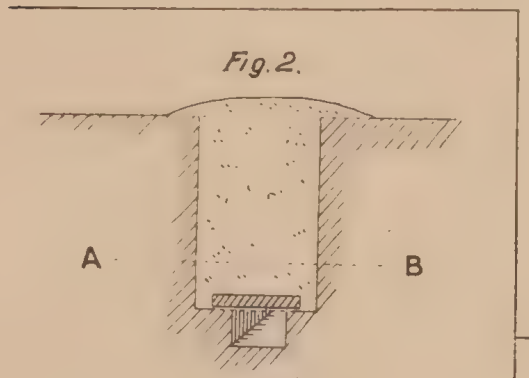
entrance is required; the foxes will soon make others if they want them.

Begin by digging a trench about two feet wide, and certainly not less than four or five feet deep, as much more as you please, straight into the face of the hill for about fifteen feet, and then branch off to the right and left (Fig. 1), at not too sharp an angle (about 130 degrees with the main), for from fifteen to twenty feet more, keeping the bottom of the trench, as near as possible, on a horizontal plane; next, down the centre of this trench dig a smaller one eight inches wide by seven inches deep, to constitute the "earth," covering the latter with tiles or flags as wide and as long as you can get them; the sides of the hole are in this way formed by the natural soil, which is much to be preferred to either stone or brickwork, the latter being apt to become damp and mildewy, and foxes frequently contract mange from the chill occasioned by lying against a cold, damp surface, especially if run to ground very heated, wet, and exhausted; the natural soil, however, will keep them dry and warm. The ends of the holes should be prolonged, some two feet, say, beyond the artificial covering by tunnelling with

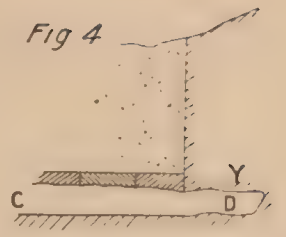
— ARTIFICIAL FOX EARTH —



— GROUND PLAN —



SECTION



SECTION ON C D

SIDE VIEW OF TUNNEL

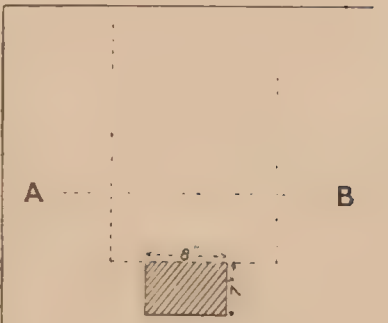


Fig. 3.

9" PIPE EARTH

the spade for about that distance (Fig. 4); this will make a small natural hole with earth overhead, and induce the foxes to continue the excavation.

The upper trench should now be filled in and the soil rammed down hard, otherwise in very wet weather the rain may percolate down into the earth through the loose soil and make it damp, and, in order to still further prevent this, the surface should be elevated about six inches or so above, and overlapping, the sides of the original trench (see Fig. 2); the rain will, therefore, run off on either side of the excavated earth, which will remain dry. In front of the mouth of the earth a heap of sand should be thrown, to give it a natural appearance, as if it had been drawn out of it, and where the cubs can lie and bask in the sun. A few young rabbits may, with advantage, be turned into the earth, and the foxes, if there are any about, will soon find them there, and, going in after them and seeing how nice and snug it is, will probably take to it as soon as the smell of the fresh earth has worn off. If there are no foxes about, some cubs had

better be turned down in the earth in the manner described in Chapter III. and the earth should not be stopped during the next hunting season, or until such time as the foxes have taken well to it and made it their home. One has to risk being pitched into by the M.F.H. should he run a fox to ground there; but, never mind! the foxes, when they find it a secure asylum, will take to it all the quicker, and you will then be well repaid later on, and the master will smile again when your coverts are never drawn blank!

Never allow a terrier to be put into your artificial earth, as the smell remains for a considerable time, and destroys the foxes' sense of security in it, and will most probably prevent the vixens from laying down their cubs there.

Never under any circumstances make a "*chamber*" in the earth; doing so is one of the chief causes of artificial earths being so objectionable. It becomes full of filth of all sorts, mangy foxes love to kennel in it, as they can sit up and scratch, and often die there, and this will infect the

earth for years and necessitates it being done away with. A fox should not be able to stand or sit up in the earth, but, at the bifurcation of the holes (Fig. 1) there should be sufficient lateral space left, by rounding off the angles, to enable it to turn round easily, and this is where a fox usually curls up. Should it be necessary to make the hole any wider, or deeper, let the foxes do so themselves.

The figures (p. 151) will show what I have endeavoured to describe above, as far as the construction of the earth goes, and the dimensions of the actual hole, given in Fig. 3, are taken from measurements of natural earths made entirely by foxes themselves, and it is as well to stick as closely as possible to Nature, artificial earths, as a rule, being made far too large and roomy, which is a great mistake. The actual mouth of the natural earth is, of course, much larger, and the ground, as a rule, sloping gently down into it. This should be similarly arranged in the artificial earth.

The flags or tiles forming the roof of the earth should overlap the sides by five or six inches at least, otherwise, in light or gravelly

soil, the latter are likely to crumble away under the great weight on top; to prevent which, should any difficulty be experienced in obtaining tiles or flags of a sufficient length, it becomes necessary either to put brickwork or stones along the sides, or, as an alternative, to arrange half nine-inch pipes on two single rows of bricks, running parallel to each other, and nine inches apart, which answers fairly well (Fig. 5). The pipes and bricks should be fastened with cement; this will keep the earth very dry. It is a great mistake, however, to make the earths too elaborate, the simpler they are the sooner the foxes will take to them, and the more likely they are to remain healthy and satisfactory.